University of Alberta

I Am Who I Am! A Story of Empowerment

by

Mountain Water Woman/Rose Laboucan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **I Am Who I Am! A Story of Empowerment** submitted by Mountain Water Woman/Rose C. Laboucan in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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I dedicate this thesis to the children of tomorrow.

Abstract

My Thoughts Are Free . . . My Soul Set Free

Interpretation of Life by Understanding Internalized Colonization

I recall being in the Chief and Council chambers, and someone asked me how my studies at the University of Alberta were coming along. I replied, "Good. I am learning about ethnography right now." Someone said, "What is that?" I explained that the term was used in research. Her nervous laughter reminded me that my familiarity with the word *ethnography* was not the same as hers. The unfamiliarity of the term was not interpreted as a lack of knowledge in any way because I understood the term only by my access to the setting of the university. I did not need to impress or belittle anyone in the room. I let the conversation drift to a different topic.

I wondered if my enthusiasm about learning intimidated anyone else back home. When I was at home on the reservation I felt the same as everyone. When I was at the university I felt intimidated by the pressure placed on me to do the best in my endeavour. I was torn between two worlds, my Indigenous background and the world of the Euro-Canadian view. The two worlds did not seem to balance. Why did these two sides of me seem so pressured? Why couldn't life be the same in both worlds?

My thesis addresses the term *internalized colonization*. My reality check of being called an "apple," White on the inside and Indian on the outside, opened a new door. I reached a level of understanding I could use to change my outlook on life. I decided on a "narrative inquiry" approach to tell a story about my life and educational experiences.

I pray that my thesis will guide the young people of tomorrow. Success comes from our own expectations and not those of others. Dream big, and only you can make it come true.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Creator for allowing me to meet Dr. Jean Clandinin. I thank her for her guidance and wisdom. Jean believed in me, believed that I could write a story. I knew I had a story; the question was whether or not I could write it. Jean never once doubted my skills. Her encouragement, her praise, her patience, her time, and most of all her friendship will always be a blessing in my life.

A very special thank you to Dr. Peggy Wilson and Dr. Stan Wilson. They dared to have a dream. I honour their courage to guide First Nation students to a level of greater understanding about issues surrounding education in a First Nation community.

I thank the following people—Dr. Heber Hampton, Elder Edward Bellerose, Rebecca Martel, and Mary Huculak—for sharing their wisdom with me. There are so many other educators and friends too numerous to mention. I wish to say thank you to each one of you.

I honour my father, Henry Bellerose, who watches over me from above. I wish to thank my mother, Maggie Bellerose, for always being there for me; and my sisters Paula Giroux, Marge Bellerose, Kathy Bellerose, and Lillian Bellerose; and my brothers Bill Bellerose and Arthur Bellerose.

I thank the Driftpile First Nation leadership for their monetary sponsorship of my educational journey.

I want to thank my cohort group for allowing me into their lives. Our group picture taken at Nakota Lodge in Morley, Alberta, has been an inspiration to me. Thank you, Paula Giroux, Melissa Turner, Patsy Steinhauer, Lewis Cardinal, Tim Marguetts, Brenda Jones-Smith, Peter Hanohano, Noella Steinhauer, Jane Martin, and Bernadette Sowan.

I honour my sister Rosemarie. No one should die from abuse and violence. She has become my forgotten Warrior.

The Forgotten Warrior

As I look into the distant horizon,
I see a forgotten warrior.
A warrior of honour and great dignity
That watches over all womankind.
As this forgotten warrior approaches me,
I hear a her sing a song that creates
A lump in my throat causing me great
Difficulty to swallow.
As we meet face to face, I suddenly
See that she has no face.
Yet she begins to speak.
She talks of all the sorrow and pain
Women have gone through.
She talks about the degradation and humiliation.
Tears begin to fill my eyes as I
Cannot control the hurt that fills my
Soul. The forgotten warrior
Leaves me with a message.
The message to respect and honour
All womankind.
(Dedicated and written by Jerry E. Laboucan)

I wish to express my warmest gratitude and love to my family. I want to thank my husband, Eugene Laboucan, and my sons, Jerry and Scott Laboucan, for teaching me so many life lessons and giving me unconditional love. I thank my daughter-in-law, Tanya, for bringing into this world our two beautiful grandchildren Autumn Eagle and Vincent Hawk. They are the future.

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CHAPTER 1

ONE, TWO, THREE: READY OR NOT!

Introduction: Silent Thoughts

Awakened by a contrary dream one Sunday morning, I felt as though I hadn't slept. Lying in bed, I thought, Why am I in such a miserable mood? Most of my dreams are usually quite memorable. But, for some unknown reason, this one was not. It felt like a rude awakening. Finally, I decided to get out of bed. I allowed myself to sit quietly at the kitchen table of our three-bedroom trailer. I sat in total silence for some time, wondering what the future held for me. Should I apply for the position of Education Director in my community? Should I concentrate on finishing my schooling? What was my family going to think? What would my husband, our two sons, our daughter-in-law, and especially our two grandchildren think? Would I let the whole community down if I did not complete my master's thesis? Would everyone think I was a quitter? Was this another crossroad in my life? Why did making decisions that impact my life create such confusion for me? I decided to smudge and pray to the Creator, hoping to level off the mood I was in. My prayers were no different from those on any other day. I gave thanks for seeing another day and for having my family and friends around me. Still, I wondered, why did I feel so pressured? I normally enjoyed these moments of tranquillity and being totally by myself on Sunday mornings. My mind began to race a mile a minute. I felt that I needed to slow it down a tad. I turned on the Aboriginal radio station to listen to old country songs, hoping to distract myself from my thoughts.

I was puzzled as to why it seemed that for most of my life this feeling of not being good enough crept into my thoughts. Why did I feel this way? Knowing I had to start all over again on my thesis was heavy on my mind. As a matter of fact, I was really bothered. It was another reminder that I had not done something right. I have always disliked it when I feel that I am being given a raw deal. I tried to push away the thought

of not being good enough. Being Native had nothing to do with it this time. I began to realize that I had not tried hard enough. I realized that my first attempt at writing my thesis was unproductive. I had no framework and had not even begun my analysis for my thesis.

No one told me this in so many words; I felt it in my heart. How could I make my second attempt more meaningful? Would I be disappointed once again? A song called *Your Cheating Heart* by Hank Williams began to play on the radio, and with the song came a wave of new ideas.

Several minutes later, still feeling gloomy, I wondered why this song was making me feel so lonely. I began to deliberate about why songs, rhymes, pictures, situations, or even places I had never been could conjure up feelings of joy, pain, resentment, or anger in my life. I believe that there is mystery in wondering about these embodied feelings that seem to erupt on their own. Could it be that my life is just this way? I concentrated on the notion of "memory"[1] and decided to pursue the idea of writing about life experiences that led to change in my life. What a great thesis idea this might be.

All kinds of memories flashed into my mind, memories of different experiences from childhood to adulthood. Some memories are those that I call "memories of cherished experiences."

Other memories are those I call "memories of painful experiences," the kind that seem to suffocate me, at times in total control of me. Could it be that maybe I just refuse to let go of the past? For some reason, memories of painful experiences are a big part of my remembered experiences. They usually stay lodged somewhere way in the back of my mind. The memories I mean are those that leave me in a daze when someone might make

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[1] Hampton (1995) explored the idea of memory. He noted that memory comes before knowledge. My memory of my painful and cherished experiences has manifested into a bundle of knowledge. I am able to acknowledge and learn from my experiences.

the age-old offer, "a penny for your thoughts." These are the kind that sometimes make me feel that I may have missed out on something in life.

Sitting still on that Sunday morning, I wondered why I always place obstacles before myself. Are my expectations of myself too high or not high enough? Why do I allow myself to be stuck within the limitations of my memories of painful experiences? Why do I always have to prove myself to others? Why can't I just do something for me?

Does it matter? I thought. I wanted to convince myself that life goes on, no matter what. Even though I've heard many times that life experience stories are a dime a dozen, I believe that a story about a middle-aged Aboriginal women on a small Indian reserve in Northern Alberta is worth sharing.[2] After all, I am struggling to survive in a dominant society, striving to obtain a master's degree in First Nations education. I feel that each one of us has a story to tell, all in our own time and in our own way. I pray that my experience that I share in this thesis may be an inspiration to the young generation.[3]

At this point in my life, recounting memories of painful experiences, experiences that caused turmoil in my life, may also enlighten me emotionally and spiritually.[4] It is ironic that I should look for both emotional and spiritual enlightenment, because the

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[2] I felt a narrative inquiry best suited my purpose because it allowed me to narrate my personal experiences in a supportive social context. I could reconstruct my narrative self-conception of my experiences, so that they became more comprehensive and complex. An autobiographical narrative was an excellent way to research life experiences. Therefore, I was able to understand the purpose of my educational and life experiences in holistic contexts. I examined experiences from different age levels and social context in order to create a balance in my research. In the context of research Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 24) identified a narrative as the study of how human beings make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose of the future. Bissex (1988) wrote, "We share our meaning with each other in the hope that the meanings of one person's story will help seek and find the meaning of theirs" (p. 775). Brant (1994) describes that, observed that "who we are is written on our bodies, our heart and our souls" (p. 74).

[3] Monture-Angus (1995) wrote that true wisdom comes from what we do with our life experience. Once we understand what the experience means, then the experience can work for us. My purpose is to inspire and motivate young people with my story.

[4] Young (1997) described how writing about her memories of educational experiences led to the discovery of an incredible healing journey within herself.

emotion and the spirit were left out of my educational experience. Only the physical and intellectual parts of me were catered to. I know that I need to move on.

Helen Keller once said, "When one door closes, another door opens." Right now, I need to open new doors in my life. I think I have stayed behind the closed doors of my painful experiences much too long. I cannot think of a better way to open a new door, and possibly doors for others, than through an autobiographical narrative inquiry[5] of my personal life interwoven with my educational journey. I no longer feel that this thesis is such a burden. An Elder who I respected once told me that the "Indian way" is to give back something you have been given.

Giving back my story is a gift for a First Nations master's degree. Rigney (1997) wrote, "Indigenous people now want research and its design to contribute to the self-determination and liberation struggles as defined and controlled by the communities. To do this, indigenous people themselves must analyze and critique indigenous epistemologies that are common place in higher learning" (p. 1). Rigney (1998) also spoke sadly about the legacy of racism, its ideology, and the continuity of reshaping knowledge of Indigenous people via colonial research methods. Deloria (1991) recognized that serious researchers of Indigenous communities should focus on actual community needs and be sensitive to community wishes and attitude.

A Glimpse Into My Childhood

> *"Kookum, Kookum," my grandson sang, disrupting me from my deep thought. His voice was sweet and clear, but somehow I avoided it. In the back of my mind I could hear my eldest son telling his son, "No, Kookum is busy now; we will visit her later," respecting my space. Outside I could faintly hear my grandson's dog barking as they strolled home.*[6]

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[5] Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Dewey (1983), and Schon (1983) argued for understanding knowledge as experiential, narrative knowledge embodied in persons. A narrative of experience of an indigenous woman is not just important, but also essential.

[6] Italics indicates present-day thoughts or moments.

The sound of the fading bark brought a flood of memories of my childhood. They buzzed around in my mind, creating a view that brought a smile on my face. I thought about my first home. I remembered calling my home a long house. It seemed long anyway, when I was scrubbing the floor on my hands and knees. This memory called up another, this one about water. We had no running water. The scarcity of safe drinking water at the time made sure we maximized the use of it. We all shared the same water to wash our hands and face.

Time was of the essence in the mornings. No one was allowed to linger in the small bathroom we shared each morning. Taking a sponge bath was a treat. Our water was delivered once a week, and this water was used for cooking and a small amount for washing. My parents paid three dollars to have our barrel filled. No one was allowed to play with water. Many times the barrel was right down to the last drop.

We had no indoor plumbing either, so we used an outhouse located at the back of the house. This was okay, except in the winter time. It was cold to run outside and sit on the frosted-over seat. I hated using Eaton's catalogue pages for toilet paper. I preferred mandarin orange wrappers instead. Crinkled up, they made better tissues, softer anyway. We were not lucky enough to have electricity. We used oil lamps and sometimes made alternative candles out of braided cloth oiled with lard for light. Now, as I look back at these flickering memories, I see that we were quite innovative.

But no matter; living on the reserve with my dad and mom, two brothers, and four sisters was wonderful. Our house was located about 300 metres from a railway track. The house used to shake a little when the train went zooming by. I guess you could say I lived on the other side of the tracks. I never knew if this was the right side or the wrong side. I knew it was the right side when our grandfather used to walk home from the store, because we would be waiting for him on the side of the road. He always gave us a candy or two, and we would run back to the house to enjoy them. I knew it was the wrong side when my schoolmates would say that I was from across the tracks. They usually did not

mean it in a nice way. It usually meant that they thought people from my side of the community were doing unlawful things.

As I sat and the sounds around me continued to fade out, I needed to concentrate even harder. I could see the flickering fire in the wood heater that sat in the centre of our bedroom. The warm glow from the wood heater was magnetic as it drew me in even closer. The bed that I shared with my younger sister must have been given to us by the health nurse. It reminded me of a bed I had seen at the federal nursing station. It was so high from the floor that we could play underneath it. The comforter I used was lightweight and often did not keep my body warm. With fall setting in and winter knocking on the door of Mother Earth, I tried to snuggle even tighter under the comforter. Even that did not seem to help. I remember I often focussed on the light of the fire when I was unable to fall asleep.

I began to remember one night when all seemed so very still, no movement, no sounds, until my sister let out some gas. I could not help but laugh because the sound was so clear. My other sisters joined in and began laughing with me. I could hear my mother down the hall yelling, "Go to sleep now!" But you know how it is sometimes; giggling can be contagious. My mom yelled again, "Go to sleep now! You will be lazy for school tomorrow." Then I remembered that a hush came over the room once more, because we could hear my father coming towards our bedroom. He never had to say anything; he just had to walk towards our room and we would be quiet and fall safely to sleep. We always knew when to stop.

Another memory came to mind, a special memory. The morning air was cold, but I knew my father would have already started breakfast. I quickly put on my socks because I knew the floor would be cold. September was finally here, and today was my first day of school. Today was a special day for me. I was five years old, and I was just like my big sisters. I was going to be ready before them today. They were not going to leave me behind. I was not going to watch them at the big window today and cry. My dad

had gone to visit the principal at the school to convince him that I was ready to start school. The principal agreed.

> *When I've thought about the early years of my life, I had no idea that being black, red, white, or yellow made a difference.*[7] *I only knew that I loved to have fun and learn.*

Running freely through a field of very tall grass, I remember feeling proud of the new clothes my parents bought for my first day of school. The light breeze was gently touching my face, and the grass swayed as though it was going to grab me. I felt very powerful, yet afraid. I was supposed to wait for my two older sisters and my brother, but the excitement of my first day of school overwhelmed me. I was too curious to wait for them.

My oldest brother and my two older sisters started school when they were seven years old because that was the way it was back then.[8] I know that my oldest brother went to a residential school for a little while. My older sisters did not. I know that my mother and father did.[9] My mother was raised totally in the mission because her mother died giving her birth, and there was no one to raise her.

I remember one time listening to my oldest sister saying that the only reason my parents sent me to school at the age of five was because they were tired of hearing me cry and plead every morning. I recall that it seemed that whenever we played games at home, we ended up playing school. I knew how to be a good student already, because I knew

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[7] While I lived in a racist Canadian society at the time, I had been somewhat sheltered and knew no life other than life on the reservation.

[8] The Indian Act, 1867, governed Indigenous people of Canada. The act stated that an Indian Child is mandated to start school at the age of seven.

[9] In a workshop in 1999 in Hilo, HI, Meyer best depicted the dark times of the residential-school era in Canadian history: "We the aboriginal people live in a colonial state where our language, culture, beliefs, and way of knowing have been compromised and targeted for assimilation or extinction."

that I had no choice but to listen to my older siblings. One of them was always the teacher. I was never allowed to play the teacher role because I was too young.

- *The rule that Indian children were not supposed to start school until they were seven according to the Indian Act did not concern me, nor did I care at five years old. Little did I know that my yearning and persistence to go to school would influence and shape who I became.*

That morning I knew only that I was feeling free and heroic while I ran through the tall grass that seemed to want to hold me back from reaching my destination, the two-room school house. I recall feeling intimidated the moment I set foot on the steps of the schoolhouse which had been built in 1952, a year after I was born. It is still being used today as an education office. My Grade 1 classroom seemed large. At the front of the room was a table. Facing it were rows of desks, one of which was for me. I was excited. Many of my classmates-to-be were also wearing new clothes. The room, in spite of its coldness, drew me in, and a feeling of curiosity set in. There were no pictures hanging on the walls, and the room smelled very clean. I knew nothing about the rituals[10] of the school environment except from the role playing of school at home with my sisters.

The moment I entered the classroom, I had to line up to be inspected for cleanliness. My sisters had not played this part with me at home. I copied everyone else and held my hands out to be examined. I did not think anything was wrong with them, but I was soon to learn that I was wrong. I was to line up again at the washroom so that I could scrub my nails. I remember the washroom at school fondly, because the water flowed freely and I could really scrub my hands so that they would be clean enough for the teacher. After all, I thought, they were clean enough for me.

Back in the classroom my hands were inspected once more. This time I passed and was allowed to take a seat. This accomplishment felt good. I remember that I loved to

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[10] Spindler and Spindler (1994) wrote about cultural transmission and the impact of the teacher on a student. This research assumes the impact of the repeated ritual on the student. In my experience these rituals contributed towards conformity, thus assisting the assimilation process.

please my teacher because it made me feel special. Whenever I did something right she used to say, "Rose, you are so smart." I recall that I would beam for the rest of the day.

My teacher was nice. She looked pretty with her light skin and her hair all fixed up. She wore such nice clothes. Sometimes, she almost looked like a ghost. Her cheeks were rosy and her lips were red, and she smelled of pretty flowers. As for me, I remember myself as very shy. I imagined I looked like a lost mouse, skinny and short, with big brown eyes. My grandfather, who used to give us candy, would call me Sparkling Eyes. He had a nickname for everyone. My father had a nickname for me too. He called me Babe, short for Baby. My dad was a fiddle player. Sometimes he played for us at home and we had to dance for him. I always tried to be last because sometimes we ran out of time. My shyness made me glad to skip my turn.

I recall that I followed instructions very well. This made me a good listener on that first day in school. We played games and did school work like colouring and writing for the rest of the day. The day seemed to pass by quickly for me. I loved to learn new things, and my teacher seemed nice enough to me. I looked forward to each new day, for each day seemed to bring a new experience.

Several weeks later I was sitting in my Grade 1 classroom, waiting patiently for new instructions. By now most of the routines passed by without much anticipation. The teacher took an unsharpened pencil and a piece of paper and began her journey around the classroom. I was seated at my desk, and she stood beside me. She proceeded to look in my hair, making trails with the pencil, and inspected every spot in my head. I sat in my seat motionless, almost breathless. A million eyes were staring at me. My mind was screaming, Stare, stare, like a bear. My body, rigid, seemed to do nothing. She finally went to the next student after what seemed like an eternity. This routine became a ritual for me. I did not like it at all; in fact, I hated it. The teacher was inspecting me for head lice. She did not touch my skin or my hair with her hands, only with the pencil. Now I

recall that she never touched my hands when she inspected them. I wonder now about her way of doing things.

> *This is one of those memories of painful experiences that brings forth angry and resentful feelings. Tears gently flow from my eyes. I ask the Creator to wash away the anger that has been within my soul for such a long time for this demeaning experience.*

My mother used to look in my hair very gently with her hands. She did not make me feel less than I was. I know that in her own way my mother tried to prepare me for this humiliating experience. She looked in my hair the night before in the living room, in front of my siblings, just to make sure that there were no unhealthy varmints in it. For years I thought only Indians had lice. When the teacher was looking in my hair for lice, I felt alone and lost momentarily. Even the students I thought I knew in class seemed to be staring at me as though I was a stranger. I wanted to yell and scream, "Leave me alone!" I did not; I was not raised to be disruptive.

> *Much to my dismay, this feeling of shame would come over me repeatedly in my life. You may wonder as you ponder the notion of having lice, Why is this topic even coming up? Do the words lice or bugs create a creepy-crawly feeling? I know it does for me. Even as I write about this memory, my head feels itchy.*

The first time was the worst. These hair-raising episodes became more and more ritualistic throughout my elementary school years. Each time was no better than the last. Each time I imagined I heard a pin drop in the room. Each time shame filled the atmosphere, making it almost unbearable to be there. I felt obligated not to make a fuss. No one ever made a fuss because, if we did, we would get a strap. I recall that someone got a strap every day, and I remember being very afraid of the strap. We sat silently as she made her way around the room. Some students were given notes to take home.

> *Why did the idea of feeling grateful I did not have lice overpower the shaming process? Is this the human way, or is this just how it is for Indian people? because no matter what, I can still hear the words Shame, shame on you*

> *drumming in my mind. Feeling shame is a very painful emotion for me because it created a strong sense of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness, and disgrace within me.*[11]

When I think about the strap and the lice-hunting incidents, I feel nauseated and angry. During my elementary school years I survived different experiences that made me feel ashamed of who I was. I remember chanting, over and over again in my mind, "I do not want to be an Indian." The students who came back to class the next day were the survivors of the hunt. The students who did not come back to class the next day usually did not come back at all. I often wonder if this shaming process was too hard to handle for some of the students who did not come back.

I flash to another memory. The first time I received one of these notes was when I was in Grade 4. I was so embarrassed that I lied to my friends. I told them that I would not be coming to school the next day because I was going to town with my dad. My friends accepted the story because I never missed school unless I was sick. I remember when I gave the note to my mother. She was upset with me, as though it was my fault that I had lice. I could not play outside with my friends that day because my mother had to clean my hair. I felt insecure because it seemed that I was taking up her time. Her touch was no longer gentle, and she made me feel guilty. I was stripped of my clothes and given clean ones. The ones I had on had to be washed, along with the bedding from our bed. God forbid that I should pass them to my sisters or brother. The washboard and washtub came out, and the water needed to be heated. Then the laundry needed to be hung out. There was real work happening here. As the evening proceeded, I wanted to crawl into a hole and stay there till this was all over. I was receiving mixed messages from my mother. Where was her gentle touch when I needed it? As I think about this

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[11] Hulsebosch (1993) stated that at a very young age, "Who I was became defined by where I was and what I was doing" (p. 6). In elementary school I was an Indian child who believed everything she was taught. When I did something good, I was praised. When I was made to feel less than I was, I believed it. I trusted that the teacher was telling me the truth.

experience, head lice disrupted not only my school environment, but also my home life. In elementary school I always had short hair after that; I was not going to take any chances.

> *As a matter of fact, I have never had long hair in my life. The school experience of feeling shame and my home experience of feeling that I was a burden did little for my self-worth.*

I think that it was in elementary school that I became an excuse maker. Some people might say that I became a good liar just to stay out of trouble. I remember once, when I was in Grade 4, that one student who received a note did not come back to school. Her parents came in the next day and told the teacher that she was moving away. I know that she never did.

> *I also know that I cannot attribute her quitting school to these hair-raising episodes. I question whether the possibility was there to quit school because the shame was too hard to handle. Even though this part of my past is like a recurring nightmare rather than a real-life experience, I have managed to survive. The formal learning portion of my schooling was wonderful; it was the expectation that I would fit into someone else's image that caused turmoil and concern in my life.*[12]

Another memory comes forward. One morning in school the teacher began class by explaining the importance of proper nutrition. She emphasized that we were lucky that we were looked after. The federal government supplied the school with vitamin pills, powdered milk, and biscuits; and these items were distributed to us in the morning before recess. The teacher had good intentions, but the way she said it made me feel like a beggar.

Could we not take care of ourselves? Was our food source not adequate? I knew that refusing these items would make me stand out in class, and I did not want that to happen. Many times I did not enjoy the vitamin pill and the biscuit. I would hide them

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[12] LaRocque (1978) wrote that Euro-Canadian missionaries and government agents worked hand in hand in their relentless attempt to transform Indian people into their own image.

and give them to the dogs outside at recess. It seemed that the dogs enjoyed the biscuit but only sniffed at the vitamin pills and would not eat them either.

> *The biscuits I am talking about are now sold in supermarkets and are called dog biscuits. The notion that I was disobeying and being bad on the sly concerns me. I know it was wrong on my part, but the biscuits were too hard to enjoy, and the vitamin pills tasted awful.*

I remember that at home when I did something wrong, there were no excuses. It never dawned on me to lie or hide anything. Why was I lying and hiding things in school? Why did it seem that I was getting away with something? I began to question why my two worlds seemed to collide.

In grade school I believed in the teacher. Everything she said was the truth. I believed for years that Columbus discovered North America. I remember that I was a child who loved to learn. I did not know that there was more to life than school and home on the reservation.

When I turned eight years old, I became very ill. I had to go to the Charles Camsell Hospital far away from home. I was amazed that a different place existed, a place where I felt totally lost and more alone than ever. The Charles Camsell Hospital was a hospital built for Indians, I was told by the federal nurse. I recall the loneliness that I felt sitting on the shiny polished floor in the doorway of my hospital room. Slowly wiping the tears from my eyes, I curiously looked towards the long corridor and watched old Indian people talk on the radio in a strange language. We did not speak our Cree language at home, nor did we speak it in school.[13]

Most of the people spoke broken English saying "Hello" to their families, probably far, far away. The priest who was handling this radio event motioned me to come closer. I refused, and I sat on the floor and watched, but I did not talk on the radio. I

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[13] Ing (1991) concluded that corporal punishment was associated with speaking your native language. Children were taught that their own culture was inferior and uncivilized, even savage.

pushed aside my loneliness by thinking about the excitement of my first experience of a train ride from Faust to Edmonton, Alberta. I wore a baby-blue dress with a white collar, white socks, black shoes, and a matching sky-blue coat with white buttons. I felt like a princess. My father and I made this excursion together. It seemed that he was the one responsible in a time of crisis.

I made this yearly trip to the hospital until I was about 13 years old. Sometimes the federal health nurse took me, but most of the time my father came with me. I only went once on the train; the rest of the trips were by car or Greyhound bus. The doctor diagnosed me with rheumatic fever,[14] which seemed to flare to its peak usually in the late winter or early spring. I remember the time of the year because I always received Valentine cards from my classmates back home. I cherished those cards because they made me feel special.

My father and mother came to visit only once during my hospital stays. I know that my mom was excited to be there. She gave me five dollars, which was a lot of money for a young girl at the time, because pop was only a dime then. I did not get to spend the money because the nurses kept it for safekeeping and did not return it when I left. I usually stayed in the hospital for one to two months at a time. I know that once I stayed for three months. The hunt for lice was part of the ritual each time I went to the hospital. At 10 years old, it seemed a normal part of my life for someone to make me feel less than I was.

> *This memory brings me back to a novel I once read by Louise Hay in which she talked about rheumatism being attributed to feelings of being victimized. Rheumatism would be the problem, the probable cause would be victimization, and a possible solution would be a positive thought pattern such as "I live and approve of myself and others." Somehow this makes sense to me, but it does not*

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[14] Rheumatic fever is a severe infectious disease occurring in children. Some characteristics are fever and painful inflammation of the joints. Rheumatic fever can result in permanent damage to the heart valves. I took antibiotics until I was 18 years old.

matter what I may think. I know only that the onset of my illness came suddenly and left me just as suddenly when I was about 13 years old.

On our first trip, when we arrived in Edmonton, Alberta, my father took me to the Army and Navy store. I was totally intrigued by the hustle and bustle of the city. The colourful hand windmills caught my eye, and I decided to take one. I did not know I was supposed to pay for it; I had not been in a big store before. My father did not realize that I had it in my hand, and we walked out of the store with it. When my father noticed it, we had to go back into the store, and my father had to explain to the clerk that this was my first time in a big store. He paid for the windmill, but the clerk did not look amused, and neither did my father. I later learned that the disappointed look on my father's face was more distress because he barely had enough money to pay for the windmill.

I think my dad was trying to ease my mind by taking me to a big store. He knew that he would be leaving me behind, and it had to be hard on him. It was hard on me that first night at the hospital. I cried myself to sleep that night and many of the nights to follow.

My father and mother must have sacrificed something in order for me to have such a wonderful outfit for the trip to the hospital. I only remember getting new clothes for special events such as the first day of school, treaty day, and Lac St. Anne pilgrimage.

Looking back now, my father worked hard to provide for his family. I know that money was scarce for First Nation people in the 1950s and 1960s. I know that my father took any kind of job just to make ends meet. While I was growing up, my father was away from home a lot, trapping, working on a farm, doing labouring work, and so on.

I remember one time when I was around 10 years old, I was allowed to go with my dad to work for the summer, along with other family members. The job was near Fawcett, Alberta, and involved picking roots and rocks from a farmer's field. The pay wasn't much, but my dad took the job anyway. My mother never came with us. Still, it

was a wonderful summer, and my older sister learned how to drive a car in the farmer's field. We ate well and helped out as much as we could.

> *It is often said that "life is what you make it." It seems to me that throughout my childhood I was subjugated to ways of learning how to cope with mainstream society's ways of life. My father was disappointed that summer because he did not get paid what they had promised him even though the work that he had been assigned to do was completed. I often wondered why and to what point a person could suffer pain caused by shame and not give up on life.*

Another memory flashes to mind. September had returned once again, and everyone was settling in after the summer holidays. I experienced unfairness for the first time. I think it was the second week of school, a Wednesday morning, when we had a spelling test. The morning started with an air of silent obedience in the classroom. It seemed that our teacher was prowling back and forth like an angry lion. He was a tall, military-looking man, and I was afraid of him. The words that came out of his mouth left me chilled to the bone. He roared, "Someone in this room cheated!" He continued to pace the floor and demanded to know who it was. No one dared to say a word, no one moved, and the silence seemed to make him more angry. He marched to his desk and opened the drawer on the right side of his desk, his face red. He pulled out a strap about two feet long, black, and about half an inch thick. Sweat began to drip down the side of my face. I sat in the third desk from the front, on the left side of the room. He called the first student to the front of the class and proceeded to strap him, three swings on each hand. Did he cheat? I thought to myself. Is that why he is not saying anything? Say something, I thought. The student returned to his desk. No tears, no smile.

The next student was called to the front and, again, three swings on each hand. By this time I was praying silently, Please God, help me. I faintly heard my name, "Rose, come here." I had never received a strap in my life; I had been scolded but never had a strapping from my parents or from anyone else. I got up slowly, and it seemed to take forever to reach the front of the classroom. I closed my eyes and held my hands outward

and prayed. I could feel the pain but refused to cry. I had not done anything wrong; I knew that I had not cheated, but I could not let my classmates down. No one cried. Everyone in the room was strapped that day, and the rest of the day was a blur to me. After school a friend and I usually walked home together; today was different.

We walked up to the railway tracks, about 500 metres from the school. No one could see us or hear us. We looked at one another, hugged, and began to cry. Somehow we hoped to erase the pain and humiliation we had experienced earlier.

When I arrived home my father noticed the redness in my eyes and asked, "What happened, my girl?" His way of knowing when something was wrong gentled my soul. I told him, "I got a strap today because Teacher did not know who cheated on the spelling test." My father was a happy-go-lucky person, always laughing and joking, and many things amused him. He was horrified to learn that everyone in class was strapped, and the next day my dad went to the school to find out why I had been strapped. He questioned the teacher about why he had not used a process of elimination through handwriting, work capabilities, and so on. My father did not go to the school every day, but this time he felt that there was justification for the visit. Normally, when I did something wrong in school, I was punished by having to write lines or something. I usually received added punishment at home too: I would have to do the supper dishes or some other chore. However, I think my father trusted me enough to know that cheating on a test was just not my way.

He knew that I received my first communion that summer at the community hall. I took this religious ritual seriously and knew that lying and cheating were big sins. I remember the ceremony. I was dressed in a white silk dress, with a veil, as though I was getting married. I remember that I had to kiss the Bishop's ruby-red ring when he held his hand out. I had memorized all my prayers that summer, and we went to church every Sunday. I know from the Roman Catholic teaching that the strapping I received was wrong, but I had to accept it and forgive the teacher; I had to turn the other cheek.

I am not sure what transpired between the teacher and my father. I know only that I never received a strap again. This may be because I behaved the best way I knew how for the remainder of my elementary schooling.

> *I think the process of holding things in that bother me became a part of my way of accepting things that I could not change. I believed and prayed many times that God would protect me from all wrong. Most of the time when I was young, God did not answer my prayers. I think that I allowed myself to be part of demeaning incidents time and time again until I began to believe I deserved them. This process left me feeling very unsure of myself. I did not speak out when I needed to; I did not protest the humiliation; therefore, I accepted the belittling of myself. Louise Hay, in one of her lectures on the Wisdom channel, talked about "poverty thinking" in the context of taking without paying. I relate to "poverty thinking" in the context of paying without taking. I think I have taken for myself all the school learning, but have paid with loss of dignity because there are some things over which I do not have any control. For me it seems to be internalized colonization.*

School went on, and I continued to do very well. I was already thinking about how school might be different next year, because I was going to attend junior high school in the next town; I would not be going to school on the reservation. I would ride the bus every morning and make new friends. What was my world coming to? After all, I was only going to be 11 years old in October, and I would be in Grade 7. Summer holidays were just around the corner, and I always enjoyed time with my family. The uncertainty could wait till September.

CHAPTER 2

RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT: HEADING INTO MY TEENAGE YEARS

The summer holidays went by so fast that I never had time to think about the new school I would be attending. It was better this way because I knew, deep in my heart, I was leery about meeting new people. On my first day of school I recall feeling uneasy. I woke up early in order to have some privacy in the bathroom. I had to get my lunch ready because today I would be taking the big bus to school. The trip was about 30 minutes long by the time all the students were picked up.

One thing that stands out in my mind about going to this new school was that the students were not very pleasant to me at the beginning. When the bus arrived at the school, students stood around at the entrance and stared at us. It seemed as though they were checking us out. You know how it is sometimes when you get this feeling of uncertainty; that was how it was for me on my first day at this new school. I think this uncertain feeling was mutual between the regular students and the new students from the reserve. I had this notion that I was intruding into their space, and it seemed that the students were protecting their school.

Another thing that stands out was my awareness that I was younger than my peers. The age variance created some animosity because I was only 10 years old at the start of Grade 7; in October I would be 11 years old. In elementary school I worked hard to stay out of trouble, and I was often labelled the teacher's pet. Good listening skills kept me out of trouble and out of special classrooms such as the resource room. I was never a discipline problem. I did not tattle-tale on other students in order to stay on the good side of the teacher. I just finished my assignments on time and tried to do well on exams.

> *I received a yearly monetary recognition by the reserve leadership for each year of my schooling. I usually received one for perfect attendance or one for academic achievement, and in my high school years I received both in some years. My father and mother were always proud of my accomplishments.*

The curious stares and blank looks from the students at the new school did not trouble me much. I don't know if I had grown accustomed to stares; perhaps I had become a better avoider. Sometimes, however, I felt like a freak and couldn't completely shake the feeling. Once again I tried not to stand out in the crowd. From that first morning on, I kept my distance from other students and concentrated on my work. I noticed that once I was in the classroom with my fellow students, everything seemed alright.

Outside on the playground there seemed to be a different set of rules. The students often played the same games at recess with the same students. I was familiar with the games they played, but I used to stand to the side and watch them play. One of my favourite games was called red light, green light. I liked this game because it depended on your own skills. You were signalled out of the game only if you were not listening to the commands, and everyone was treated the same. When you made it all the way, it was your turn. The children did not seem to mind whose turn it was just as long as everyone was playing.

Games in the schoolyard seemed like ice breakers to new friendships. Once children were asked to play, things seemed to work out for them. I used to hate being picked last to be on a team or not to be picked at all. I remember that when we played baseball I was always the last to be picked. Sometimes I wasn't even picked at all. I was not very good at this game because I was smaller than the rest of the children, and I was not strong. I used to sit on the sidelines and read. I liked playing games that involved everyone.

To me this school seemed no different than the school on the reservation. One thing that did not go away was the feeling of insecurity that I had which came because of little things I had to do in class, things such as reading out loud or being singled out because I had finished my homework. This feeling of being separate made me feel isolated. The teachers were all White, as were most of the students. I hated being

compared to others or used as an example to belittle someone else. I remember the teacher saying, "Rose had 100% on her spelling test. Why can't you do the same thing?" Following such comments, at recess a child would call me "smarty pants" or say something like, "You think you're so good, eh?" Sometimes when the teacher didn't make comments about my score on a test, I would lie about my mark when someone would ask me what I scored.

> *Today when I am recognized for accomplishments I am very critical of myself. Compliments are hard to accept. The teacher probably did not even realize that she was creating problems for me.*[15]

The cleanliness inspection was part of the routine at the new school too. However, there was one big difference: The hair checking was more discreet. We were called out of the classroom and into a small office in order for the health nurse to check our hair for lice. The nurse was polite, yet distant. The shame that I felt inside regarding these hair-raising episodes seemed less threatening each time because of the repetition. There were many more students in this school than there were in the school on the reserve. When I missed school here, no one noticed, and usually no one asked questions.

I found, in this new school, that the strange looks seemed more piercing and profound. I often found students staring at me. I pretended that I did not notice. I never knew what the other students were thinking, but I knew that, for me, these looks said a million things. In my junior high years I found these shameful moments of being stared at, mocked, and belittled harder to dispose of. The feelings seemed to stay with me for longer periods of time. At the age of 11 I was beginning to understand that some of my experiences were because of my Indianness. I found I used my understanding of my

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[15] Allison (1996), Bates (1997), and Battiste et al. (1995) all suggested that cultural diversity and learning styles should be incorporated into school programs, curriculum, and teacher-preparation programs. Allison dealt with building programs that embrace social and cultural diversity. Educators must understand the perspectives of people of colour. Bates recommended changes that would enhance Native children's success in training to understand the situation and meet the students' needs. Battiste examined the issues and dilemmas of First Nation education in Canada 25 years after the control of Indian education.

Indianness as a consoling escape.[16] By this I mean that I accepted being different. I accepted that my mistreatment was experienced as a shaming experience, which seemed okay. At least, at 11 years old this was the way I made sense of this feeling of unfairness that created shame within my soul. I recall the times that my girlfriend and I walked to the store to buy candy. I picture the store owners, who were White. They gave us so much attention through a snide look, a stare, a giggle. They watched our every move. Now I understand why: They were afraid we were going to steal from them. I used to think they were being friendly.

When I was 12 years old my father worked full time as a social worker for Indian and Northern Affairs, and our home life was stable. My father was not away from home as much, and we moved to a new house. Until around this time in my life I do not recall thinking that my home life was different from anyone else's.

While I had a sense of being Indian, I celebrated Christmas, New Year's, Easter, Valentine's Day and so on. At Christmas I received presents as other people did, and we ate sit-down meals at home. Birthdays were special too, and I thought that my life was the same as other people's lives. By junior high I knew something about me was drastically different, and not only because of the Indianness.

I knew I was thinking about racial injustice at the age of 11. I knew that White people in general treated my family differently, but I do not know if it was because of my father's job. Perhaps it was because life on the reservation was changing. Were we becoming so assimilated that we were being considered civilized? Only my father and mother spoke Cree to one another and to their community friends whenever it was convenient. I never spoke Cree at home or in school, and I knew nothing about the Native traditional culture. I only knew that my way of life was changing from what I was

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[16] Hulsebosch (1993) spoke about the years it took him to develop trust in his own natural abilities. On the reserve I felt like a normal child, but outside of the reserve I knew that my Indianness made a difference.

familiar with. We were eating fewer traditional foods at home now. Instead of a muskrat in the oven with its two front teeth sticking out or roasted beaver tail, there was roasted chicken in the oven. My father had a car and a nine-to-five job, and my mother worked at the local school as a cook's helper.

What was I becoming? School was even different now. No one said or did anything if I missed school. If I did well on a test, no one at school cared. If I did poorly, no one at school cared. I recall students quitting school, and the Indian agent did not do anything. The family allowance was not even disrupted.

Even though we still did not have indoor plumbing at home, at last in 1961 we had electricity on the reserve. We had a black-and-white television. Every Sunday we watched the *Don Messier Jubilee*, a show with fiddling music, which was a part of my life. My father used to play in a musical band and he was an awesome fiddle player. When he played at a dance, our whole family went. It was fun even though my parents were protective. I was not even allowed to go to the bathroom by myself at these dances. My mother escorted my sister and me, and we did not dilly-dally. We did our business and went right back into the dance hall and watched.

School was still a big part of my life. In Grades 7 and 8 time seemed to move swiftly, maybe because I was just flowing with the tide. It was not until I was in Grade 9 that I recall a significant moment when I was selected to attend a summer camp for Indigenous students. I was excited, because I always thought that summer camps were only for rich people. Because I was used to being away from home because of my hospital visits, I thought everything would be okay.

When I arrived at the summer camp on the bus, I was surprised to find only two other Indigenous students from another community at the camp; the rest of the students were White. What is going on here? I thought. I couldn't go back home, and neither could the other two. My stomach made a few turns, but I swallowed my fear and pretended that I knew what I was doing. I had no idea of the traditions of a summer camp.

I carried all of the required items on the list I had been sent. I followed the other students and was assigned a room with two other girls, both total strangers, both White. I had never lived with a White person before. What kind of ways did they have? Were they different from mine? I could not dwell on these thoughts because we were called on a loudspeaker. We had to assemble in a hall at eleven o'clock to listen to instructions about what we were able to do and not to do. We were then told to go to the lunchroom, and I somehow managed to team up with one of the Indigenous girls in the lunchroom. She told me that we had come to the wrong encampment, that the Indigenous camp was not till the following month. Marge, my new roommate who I had just met, did not seem to think anything about the whole situation, but I felt nervous. I was going to be at a summer camp with total strangers for the next three weeks, but I told myself that I would make the best of it.

In the lunchroom I felt the uncertainty of the crowd because many students did not know the others. I did not know that I would be immediately placed in a very embarrassing and demeaning position. Although even then I realized that it was not intentional, the experience was still very emotional for me. I had no idea that I was not supposed to put my elbows on the table while I ate my lunch. At home I was used to putting my elbows on something because we barely had enough room for all of us to eat at the dinner table. Here I was singled out for doing so and had to stand up while everyone chanted. They stared at me and I could hear laughter fill the room. To this day I cannot remember what was chanted; I was too devastated. I do not even remember sitting down again. I must have, because somehow I managed to function for the rest of the day. In the quiet of the night when I thought everyone was sleeping, I cried softly in my bed. Marge, one of my roommates, heard me and said, "Rose, it will be okay. I am afraid too." She said nothing else, but somehow, in silence, we made a connection.

This feeling of unworthiness came forth in my mind once more. I know that the children I was with that day did not mean to single me out. This had nothing to do with my Indianness; it was a tradition of the camp. At that time the children did not know that they would create a fear of being alone for me that would last until I was 40 years old. The idea of standing alone in what seemed like such a big open space while people laughed and stared left a scar in my soul.

A strong sense of not belonging filled me. I felt I was in the wrong place, that I did not belong. In spite of my injured spirit that summer, I spent the next two weeks struggling to belong.

What was it inside of me that made me struggle to move forward? Why did I not give up? Was it my upbringing? Was my tolerance level high enough that I could overcome this feeling of shame? My father never knew this story about my struggles at summer camp, and I thanked him when I arrived home for allowing me to experience the summer camp.

Eventually, I worked my way to partial belonging at the camp through my personal talents. I knew how to type, and I was good at it. The students formed a committee and wanted to replicate the structured environment of a town. I became the newspaper editor of the make-believe town. I allowed myself to have two wonderful friends, but I saw myself as one of the nerds in our make-believe town. The most popular boy became the mayor, and the town council was made up of his friends. In a short period of time the social events in our make-believe community displayed a hierarchy that is prevalent in most communities today.

From this summer-camp experience I learned that friendship is irreplaceable if you truly accept it. My clothes were not as modern as those of some of the other students, my hair was not cut to perfection, and there was no make-up on my face. I was just me.

Sometimes wishing for acceptance can make it come true. At least that summer I somehow became a part of the camp. Friends I made there stood by me. Marge and I continued to write to one another long after the camp was over. I learned to accept that sometimes things happen for a reason, and somehow being sent to the wrong encampment became another test of survival for me. I never went to another one after this

experience. In September 1966, a month before my 14th birthday, my father registered me in a private boarding school for Grade 10. He must have heard about this school from work, and I know that my father wanted something different for me; he wanted me to succeed in life, and I think he felt that education meant success. The school was located about 45 minutes from my home town. The school was a multicultural school with students from different ethnic and economic backgrounds. The classes were different from those in my public school, and the mornings consisted of core class work: math, science, social studies, English, and so on. The afternoons were spent in areas of interest: home economics, beauty culture, business administration, carpentry, mechanics, and so on. The students came from far and near. I stayed in a dormitory for girls all week and went home every weekend.

I remember the first time I met my roommate. It was on a Sunday evening. The girls stood around in the student lounge, and some students paired off because they knew one another. I did not know who my roommate would be. The supervisor called my name and the name of someone called Joyce, who looked friendly. The supervisor told us that we would be staying in room 56. We took our bags to the room, picked the side of the room we wanted, and, making small talk, we started putting our things away. I felt very comfortable with Joyce; she would become my first Métis friend, but I did not know this for the next few years of my life.

> *This memory evokes questions about the teaching of relevant material to diverse cultures. I had never learned in elementary school that I had a different historical background than a Métis person, and I had not learned in school about the many different languages and cultures among First Nation people. These important aspects of my heritage were experiences learned mostly out of curiosity. Because I was a kid from the reservation, no one asked me if I knew about hunting; it was assumed that I did. Here is a news flash: I always thought that a deer grew up into a moose.*

School itself was wonderful, but it was the loneliness that I fought with. I did not tell anyone about being homesick. I wanted to be in this new environment, but, at the

same time, I wanted the comfort of my family around me. We had supervisors and strict rules to follow. We did our own laundry and cleaned our rooms, which were inspected on Saturdays when I was not there. I usually did my share of cleaning on Thursdays because when Friday rolled around I was on my way home.

My first year was uneventful. On Sundays I travelled with my dad to school and on Fridays around 5:00 p.m. I would travel home with him. I made friends and enjoyed the routine of the school. The school itself was within walking distance of the dormitory. The school also had a boys' dormitory, and we mingled with them at lunch and in our regular classes. In the evenings the boys and girls shared one lounge sometimes; at first I was pretty shy with the boys and stayed pretty much with my girl friends.

The boys and girls ate together in a large lunchroom in which there were no restrictions as to which side of the room we sat on. Sometimes I was afraid to walk into the lunchroom by myself because the boys would whistle at girls if they walked alone.

I enjoyed the closeness with the students. I also enjoyed the changes happening in my life. My friends were supportive and proud of me when I did well in an exam or in sports, and I was the same with them. I joined a basketball team and did numerous fun things. I even enjoyed the mile run we had to do each morning in order to be on the basketball team. It was the feeling of belonging that kept me in this school for so long.

Most of my friends from back home were already quitting school at 14 or 15 to be in relationships. Although my father was really strict about my having boyfriends, I was not an angel, and I did have boyfriends. As a matter of fact, I had a first date, first love, first breakup, and everything that went with teenage crises. I kept myself busy and entertained.

In August 1968 my father—my friend, my mentor—died in his office at work. I have never felt such heartache in my life, and I could not imagine life without him. I remember the wake we had in our home as though it was yesterday. The body lay in a casket in our living room for one day and one night, and many people came to the house

to pay their respects. Some stayed overnight, and others stayed for only a while. For a long time this experience was like a dream. My father was special. His death when I was 15 caused my life to take a complete turnaround.

I moved back to the dormitory at the end of August that year, three weeks after my father's death to start Grade 12. Things were different now, and I missed him so much. My mother had to hire someone to take me back to school; she did not accompany me. The man who drove me back to school asked me if I had a boyfriend. When I told him that I didn't, he said, "I could be your boyfriend." He made me sick because he was not joking, and I told him he was too old for me. I never rode with that man again, nor did I tell my mother about the incident. For the first time in my school years I did not really want to return to school. I remember one day when I did not go to school but stayed in bed. The supervisor was there with me, and I cried and cried; I wanted to be with my father. She talked to me for a long time, and I was so tired that I dozed off.

I had a dream that my father had come for me. It was so real. He was standing at the foot of my bed, and I was ready to go with him, but he was leaving without me. I started screaming, and the supervisor came rushing back into my room to console me. During the time when I was trying to deal with my father's death, I think a part of me also died. I stopped going home on weekends and started getting into trouble. I skipped classes and started breaking the rules. Things that I had never dreamt of doing were becoming second nature to me. I started smoking and staying up late. My girlfriend and I climbed out our window to the roof of the building and then down the building. We frequently would sneak into town and hang out at the cafe. My girlfriend Joyce and I washed out the mudroom many times for our punishment.

In about November 1968, three months into Grade 12, I decided to drop out of school. My mother was disappointed in me and suggested that I go to Edmonton to live with my uncle. I accepted the offer, and my uncle registered me at Jasper Place Composite. I did not know anyone in the city except for my sister and my cousin, and I

was not happy. . I had no idea about the transit system and didn't even know the name or number of the bus that I was supposed to catch to get to school. I stayed for three weeks and then told my uncle I wanted to go home. He sat me down in the living room and said, "If you go home, you will never finish your Grade 12. There is no future for you on the reserve." I was unhappy, and I no longer felt hungry to learn.

I went back home and tried to help out with my younger siblings, and I did not go back that semester. I felt cheated that my father had died at the age of 48. He used to tell me, "My girl, I want you to finish school." I could always hear his words. Even then I knew I was not a quitter, and I asked my mother to call the education counsellor from Indian and Northern Affairs. I wanted to go back to school, but I wanted to live in High Prairie rather than in the dormitory. My friends had moved to town, and I wanted to be near to them.

The counsellor found me a placement in town, and I boarded with a family for the second semester. My three roommates from the boarding school, who were also Native, stayed with another family. Conveniently, the school was within walking distance. But I still was not happy by myself because I was stuck in the basement. Once again I asked my friends to ask their landlord if there was room for me at her house. She agreed, and I made arrangements once again with the education counsellor from Indian Affairs. I felt more at home with my friends, but I knew that I had to buckle down in order to graduate in June 1969.

My experience at the public high school in High Prairie was not a picnic. In this system I knew that I existed, but I did not believe that anyone else thought I did. In my classes I was just another body; I did what I was told and tried not to step out of line. I usually sat at the back of the classroom, and the teachers did not pay much attention to me. I remember one time when the teacher came into the classroom and congratulated a girl who scored 85% on a social studies test. I realized that there was nothing wrong about praising a student, especially a student who had earned a good grade despite having

missed a lot of days due to sickness, but the fact that I had scored higher than she did and that I was the only Indigenous person in the classroom was not of any significance to the teacher. I believe that students who do well no matter what their ethnic background should be acknowledged by the teacher.[17] How could I trust my own natural abilities? I sat in the back of the room that day and told myself, It is alright; you did well. I had not even studied for the test, but I did well just listening in class.

> *When I think back on my high school years, I am amazed that I even finished school. I never had a special teacher, one who stands out in my mind, one whom I can pull out of my memory bank and say that he or she was my mentor. I only knew that they were teachers and that they were White, except in Grade 9 when my teacher was from India.*

In high school the only special moments were being with my friends and the quiet times we had in our boarding room. We helped one another with homework, and somehow the four of us helped each other make it through to graduation. My father's goal for me was to finish high school, and in June of 1969 I accomplished this. In my heart I was proud.

On graduation night I remember the principal speaking highly about the students. I sat in the audience thinking that I was one of those students he was talking about. It was not until the worker from Indian and Northern Affairs was called up to the podium that I knew we were going to be treated differently as he spoke on behalf of the four Native students in the graduating class. He was not a bad person, but I felt as though I was a pound of beef ready to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. I was a young girl, Native, 16 years old, graduating from Grade 12, a feat that had not been accomplished by many Natives in 1969. I had worked hard to accomplish this, and I knew in my heart that my father would be very proud of me. I did not need to be singled out in this special moment,

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[17] Spindler and Spindler (1994) stated that it is the students' understandings and interpretations of their experiences, their culture, and their biases that assist them in seeing clearly.

and I hated being singled out because of my Indianness. I was expected to be like everyone else, but at the moment when I thought that I had fit in, someone had to wave a red flag. It was like saying, "Whoops, I forgot. You're Indian. You do not count." When that happened, I felt the pity that others felt for me. I did not want anyone to think that my graduation was a token gesture by the school, but that I graduated because I had worked hard for the credits and earned them just as anyone else had.

For graduation I wore a beautiful teal-green sheer dress and matching shoes, and my hair had been set at a hairdresser's salon. I had done all the same things that everyone else had done to get ready for this momentous event. Yet somehow the experience of graduation left me feeling so different, not quite the same as everyone else.

My mother came to the banquet, and so did my uncle from the city. My mother gave me a pair of white cowboy boots and a black-fringed suede jacket; my uncle gave me a beautiful pearl ring. I had never really expected gifts for my graduation because I did not know of the tradition that when people graduated, they were given gifts. Not until years later did I learn that many graduates receive a car from their parents. All that mattered to me was that I had finished high school.

I can still hear the valedictorian say, "Rose plans to go on to university to become a teacher." As I walked onto the stage to accept my diploma, I did not see anyone in the audience but my mother. The sound of the applause gave me hope.

When I was 16 I did not want to become a teacher. My dream was to be an airline stewardess and travel all over the world.

> *It seemed back then that, being Indian, I could not think of having a glamorous job. But I knew I was allowed to dream it because the dream was mine.*

I decided in that summer of 1969 that I would apply to an airline company. To my amazement I was granted an interview, which was arranged by a worker from the Indian Affairs office. He set up the appointment in Edmonton, Alberta. The reason that I was not

accepted as a stewardess was because I was too short; at least, that was what I was told. But it felt good because I had tried to follow up on my dream.

CHAPTER 3

ROCK-A-BYE-BABY: LIFE ON MY OWN

The sound of the thundering applause that had lifted my spirit during the moment of graduation had long since diminished. The death of my father was still heavy in my heart; his guidance was what I missed the most. During this part of my life my mother was also going through a devastating time. She had lost a husband and lost herself in the world of alcohol. Even though I thought she did not care about me, I knew that, in her own way, she did. I hated the times when I locked my two younger sisters, my brother, and myself in the bedroom because my mother had parties at our house. Sometimes I felt that I was my mom's babysitter. But this was all to change because now I was leaving home. Even as I left I felt that she had abandoned me, not that I was abandoning her.

I think that not dealing with my father's death at the time led me to decisions that changed my life. On October 3, 1970, two days before my 18th birthday, I walked down the aisle of the church in our community.

When I graduated in June of 1969 I stayed with my friends in their home town for the summer months, and I basically was on my own. When summer was over I went back home, but my home life was not a happy place, and I decided to stay with my sister-in-law in Edmonton to babysit for her. I stayed with her for about three months, and when she no longer needed my service, I decided to return to the reserve once more. It seemed that whenever I came home I was put in charge of the household. I was not ready for this responsibility, but I felt sorry for my younger brother and two sisters. I felt that I owed them something, and I decided to stay at home and look after them. My mother went out less and decided to go to school to take an arts and crafts course. I was proud of her. Spending time in the community seemed to feel good once more.

I met my husband in April 1970. In July of 1970, three months later, we were engaged. One Saturday morning my girlfriend and I rode our bikes to the local general

store, and when we arrived we saw a car pass by. It stopped on the highway and turned around, and the boys came towards the store. As I was walking up the steps of the store, the driver of the car called to me: "Do you want to go on a date on Saturday night?" Although I was scared, I said "Okay," and they drove away. My girlfriend stared at me and I said, "He won't come anyway." I knew that he was older than I was and that he was the constable for the community—a respected position, I thought to myself. That Saturday he was at my house at 6:00 p.m. to pick me up just as he said he would. I had not even told my mother. I could not go out by myself, and my sister and cousin went with me on my first grown-up date. Six months later we were married.

The October morning air was warm. The sun was shining, and the colour of the earth was beautiful. At 3:00 p.m. I would become a bride. I had borrowed my wedding dress, and I wore something blue and something new. My dress was white even though I felt that I did not deserve it, because it was against the Catholic religion to wear white if you were not pure. The morning of the wedding was spent in confusion. My mother avoided me that morning even though I needed her to sign the consent papers because I was not yet considered an adult.

The day passed quickly and the moment fast approached when I would commit myself to marriage vows. Although I had dreamed of marrying someday, I had not planned that it would be this soon. I did not feel like a bride to be; I felt lost and confused. Everything was prepared, the food was in place, and I knew I could not back out now. Somehow I managed to get wrapped up into the feelings of celebration.

> *While writing about this specific past experience, I feel as though I avoided the moment of the actual ceremony and my wedding vows. Do I really feel this strongly about the impact of this decision in my life? I think that it was a traumatic moment in my life, and this memory has spawned so many other moments. I wonder now if perhaps I was not looking for a husband but rather someone to look after me and to be responsible for me. When I look back now, I thought I was grown up, but I know I was a lost, grieving child.*

My mother did not know that I was three months pregnant on my wedding day. If she knew, she said nothing to me. I had not told my mother-in-law either, but she knew. I was ashamed that I was pregnant and not married, and I felt that there was no way that my upbringing would allow me to have a child out of wedlock. The night before the wedding I cried my heart out to my sister- in-law, saying, "I do not want to get married." She tried to convince me that I did not have to; she explained that many young girls have babies and do not get married. I had the taste of my tears in my mouth, and my father's words were stinging me like a bumble bee. He had not wanted me to have children out of wedlock. I needed him so much that day, but in the end the choice was mine to make. At 17 what sensible choice could I make?

I remember being in church, waiting at the front door and shaking; I was very nervous. My husband-to-be had started drinking with his friends, and knowing that he was not drunk yet was somehow reassuring to me. Why, I do not know. On the surface my wedding felt no different from other weddings. I heard the priest telling me to repeat after him the marriage vows, especially the words, "till death do you part."

Now when I look at my wedding pictures I see a young girl unaware of what life was about to offer.

We did not plan a wedding dance. The reception was at my husband's family home, and only a few selected guests were invited. My younger sister was my maid of honour; I had two other witnesses. By seven o'clock that evening it was pouring rain, and I wondered if this was a sign from the Creator that my marriage was headed for disaster. My husband and his friends went to the bar, but I did not go because I was underage. In the wee hours of the morning he straggled into his mother's house, and the day after my wedding, October 4, 1970, was just another day for me. I did not feel as though I had just experienced what I dreamed would be the most wonderful day of my life.

My heart aches while I write about this memory. It was very sad that a young girl should be so lost, and I cannot imagine this happening to anyone else. Six months is not long enough time to know a person. Today I advise young people to court for at least two years before they consider marriage.

In the past five years I have performed marriage ceremonies, but I find them very difficult to perform. I believe that marriage is a sacred commitment. It is said that one cannot turn back time, yet I spent countless hours sitting and thinking about how I could have done things differently in my life. However, I have made a connection towards understanding myself by turning back time to the moments of the pain, joy, or anger. Writing my autobiography is the beginning process in dealing with the memories of painful experiences which I believe contributed to destroying my spiritual and emotional inner peace. Newman (1995) acknowledged that research is as much about uncovering our assumptions as it is about seeing new connections. I find it very hard to write about this memory of a painful experience because I feel ashamed—not because someone else is making me feel shame, but because it is my own shameful moment in life. I feel as though I am letting the reader into my private space, that I will be judged and condemned. Why is not being judged and condemned so important to me? I feel as though I have invaded my own privacy. Yet deep down in my soul it feels good to write about these painful experiences, as though I am allowing my spirit to be lifted.

My husband-to-be seemed a wonderful person at the beginning of our relationship before we were married, and he treated me as if I were special. Our relationship at the beginning was as normal as apple pie. He asked me out on dates, he respected me as a woman, and he brought me home at a reasonable time. In the beginning I did not want a serious relationship, but one thing led to another. He seemed to worship the ground that I walked on. He once told me that he wanted to marry me because I was different, and I probably was to him. I learned the hard way that he was a wonderful person until he drank.

I know that this painful life experience would be useless to me if I did not learn from my mistake. I need to share this part of myself in my quest for emotional and spiritual healing. This is the hardest chapter to share with my readers, but I feel that it is very important to share what I have learned from my pain. Sharing helps me move forward, and my oldest son and I spent many hours talking about this traumatic time in our lives. I regret subjugating my child to the pain. However, remembering and sharing this deepest pain that was part of my degradation process as an Indigenous person gives me strength for the future.

I know that my shame is a deep wound that left me feeling helpless. This shame made me feel so worthless that I believed that it was okay to be abused. I questioned myself throughout my early years of married life: Did I deserve the pain I allowed myself to suffer? I later began to believe that life was this way for Indian women on a reservation in Northern Alberta. The first nine years of my marriage were filled with the colours of purple and blue, and fear was my biggest enemy.

The very first time I received a beating with a belt, I did not know why. As a matter of fact, I never knew why I was beaten. Was it my husband's hidden anger? Was it his insecurity? I wanted to leave him that first time, and yet I felt sorry for him. I once asked my husband while we were driving to Edmonton for a meeting what the hardest thing for him was about residential schooling. He was silent for quite a distance before he answered. Without looking at me, he replied, "Being taken away from my mom"—someone who I knew he loved so very much. I felt for him and the pain he must have endured in his experience. He told me that when he first went to school in the mission he spoke only Cree. He knew two words of English, *yes* and *no*, but he never knew when was the right time to use these words.

Another time, years later, he told me that when he married me he was afraid that he would not be a good provider, but he was. He was a hard worker and a good hunter, but he doubted himself when he was drinking. It might have been different if my husband had acknowledged how he felt. Perhaps then the bruises no one saw or heard about in our community would not have been so hidden, so swept under the rug.

On Monday mornings when I walked to work I prayed that no one would ask me about my weekend; I prayed that no one would notice my limp from the bruises on my legs. Once I tried to get out of the relationship, and I went home to my mother. I called the RCMP and decided to press charges, but I was told that the charges would take a long time to process and that I could possibly wait six months before anything was done. I felt that they were trying to discourage my decision, and I was devastated. "What if my

husband is crazy and wants to do something more violent to me?" I asked the police. They replied, "That is the way the law is. We have no control." I stayed with my mother for several days, and she finally convinced me to go back to my husband as if nothing had happened. I do not know if getting a divorce was taboo to my mother; I only knew that I lived in constant fear. I held a steady job, created a cover story for myself, and began to pretend that my life was wonderful.

My job was also my sanity. My first job in 1970 was with the Medical Services Branch of the federal government, and I worked as a clerk for the health centre in our community 10 years. I enjoyed meeting and greeting new people.

My first son was born on February 28, 1971, and life seemed to change a little. At least we were not going out every weekend, but only on special occasions. I often wondered if people knew what was going on in my life and never said anything to me. I am not even sure if my boss knew the problems I was having in my relationship. I did not talk about my life to anyone. I did not allow myself to have any close friends; I did not want anyone in my personal space because I feared that I would have to reveal my secrets.

> *My eyes well up with tears when I remember the pain that I endured during this period of time, not because I have not dealt with the abuse in my relationship, but because I allowed myself to be controlled by this memory of a painful experience. I wasted so much of my valuable time. If there is a regret in my life, it is that I let my oldest son be exposed to abuse and alcohol. If I could wave a magic wand and change any part of my life, this would be it. No child deserves to witness abuse in a relationship. I thank the Creator that my son chooses to live his life differently from his parents.*

My son has been my teacher many times. I once asked him why he resented me in his teenage years, and he said," Mom, you have brains. You could have walked away from the relationship at any time, and you did not." I often ask myself Why didn't I walk away from the relationship and start somewhere on my own? Was I afraid of being alone? Maybe I was stubborn enough to continue to try to make this relationship work.

Do not misinterpret my intentions in sharing this part of my life. I do not want pity because I believed in the idea that "you make your bed, you lie in it." I believe that my mother held this idea too. As I recall this process I know that I have connected my feeling of unworthiness with an internalized colonization process.[18] I want to show that society's standards were what I grew accustomed to.

My cover story kept me functioning. I remember that one day after a beating I locked myself in the bedroom for days so that no one would see me until the bruises went away. It was shortly after this experience that I fell to an all-time low. In August 1976, when my son was five years old, I attempted suicide. I could no longer handle the abuse and control in my relationship.

It is said that "the Indian way always considers the wholeness of things." When such wholeness is broken, it becomes difficult to live in harmony with the people and things around you. I thought I had this wholeness in place by living a cover story to hide the abuse, but my cover story did not allow me to live in harmony within myself.

Suicide is a serious matter. To think of suicide as a way out as I did was stupid. When I got to the point of actually attempting suicide, I was a lost soul. I see suicide as such a violent act, and it is ironic that I would choose such a violent way out when the reason behind it was violence. When I think back to this time, I wonder if walking out of the relationship would have eliminated the abuse that I allowed? Would I have looked for another abusive relationship? Why did I keep punishing myself? Did I really feel no self-worth? I do not think that I purposely looked for this type of abusive relationship. I realize now that when I contemplated suicide there was a feeling of numbness and unawareness of people and things around me. It seemed as though I did not care for

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[18] Smith (1999) wrote about decolonization research methodologies and how research is one way in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism both can be regulated and realized. *Internalized colonization* is a term that I coined to emphasize that the external conditioning, the value system, and the education structure have become embodied in my skin as a natural part of my thinking.

myself or anyone else around me. I was quiet, withdrawn. It seemed that I gave up hope of living a normal life. I remember convincing myself that I had no choice but to actually attempt suicide; I thank the Creator for not taking me that day. Suicide for me is one of the lowest places in the shamefulness syndrome.[19]

In September 1976 I entered a day group-therapy program to help me deal with suicide and abuse. The day group met every day at the centre, and we were allowed to go home in the evening. My son and I stayed with my sister and her husband. My husband did not like it and told me that only White people go through this kind of therapy. I almost believed him because, when I first went, there were only White people present. The stories that they shared in the group were unbelievable; for the first time I felt that I was not alone. This was the first time that I had been separated from my husband for three months, and I think it was the beginning of my journey into a more focussed reality. I believe that this was a turning point in my life, that I had learned something from my mistake. From experience I know that no matter which road I took or what obstacles were placed before me, life is meaningful even when it is painful.

The first time that I told my story years later in a personal growth and development workshop in our community, people were shocked. They did not believe that I had had any problems in my relationship.

Married life did not become better instantly. My husband and I still have our downfalls, but he does not drink any more, and I believe that this is a good thing for him. It takes a lot of understanding, dedication, commitment, and communication to make a relationship work. I never walked out of the relationship. With the help of an Elder, I was able to forgive my husband for his violent behaviour by understanding that a young boy

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[19] Suicide for me was a way out of society. I tried to put myself out of misery. When I was in a state of suicidal thoughts, the realm of reality became distant, so distant that I no longer felt that I was part of myself.

who is deserted by his mother can disrespect and violate women. My husband needed to deal with his inner anger from his abandonment.

> *We celebrated our 29th anniversary on October 3, 2000. I am not advising anyone to stay in an abusive relationship. If you cannot work it out, then leave the relationship. I gave this advice to my niece, and she did not listen to me. She was killed on October 8, 1995, when her husband shot her to death in a violent rage. Our community was in shock, and the school was closed because she had worked there for 12 years. No one thought that this would happen to her. I believe that people need to speak out about eliminating violence and abusive relationships in our society. Awareness of family violence, I believe, will bring about this change. In June 2000 my husband, my younger son, and his friends participated in the "Walk Against Violence" in our community in which over 100 people, young and old, took part. My heart was lifted on that day.*

My husband is a victim of the residential school experience.[20] This experience is not an excuse for his violent behaviour, but I could not dismiss him as a human being. How could I stop caring?

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[20] Bull (1991) addressed the assimilation process that cost First Nation people to lose their language and culture due to the residential experience. Ing (1993) discussed the syndromes of the residential experience, and I witnessed the devastating effects of the syndromes on my community without a language and culture to utilize or build an identity from. Another syndrome that I witnessed in my community is the lack of parenting skills. The most serious syndrome is the feeling of unworthiness: If someone told me over and over that I was no good, I would begin to believe it.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS MY CALLING: TEACHER AIDE OR TEACHER?

I recall the day that my boss, a nurse, retired from Medical Services. The staff, Chief and Council, and community members had a farewell dinner for Mary. I felt as though she was retiring from our community and not from her job, and I was lost for days. This wonderful lady who had worked for the community for over 25 years was given an honorary First Nation membership to the community. She was my friend and mentor, and when she was no longer there, I decided to change jobs.

In 1981 I took a job as a teacher's aide in our community school, where I stayed for eight years. It was during this time that I witnessed firsthand the cultural impact that teachers make on the students. I noticed their impact on our sons. I recall once when my oldest son came home from school and said, "Mom, if it was not for the White man, we would still be wearing diapers." I was shocked. I asked, "Who said such a horrible thing?" He replied, "My teacher." I chose not to get angry but decided to take matters into my own hands. I gave a history lesson that day describing what I had learned from the Elders.

> *I no longer believed that Columbus discovered America, and I knew that the Indigenous people of Canada have a wonderful history. Their history as told from their standpoints is not taught in our schools, but my dream is to incorporate our oral history into all schools one day.*

It seemed that when my oldest son was going to school, I was constantly reteaching him. I remember once when the teacher asked him why he did not have new running shoes. After all, his father was the Chief of the community. Although I knew that my eight-year-old son often did not care if his shoe was ripped, I also knew that he had to live up to the stereotypical view that Chiefs were rich. Actually, his father would not have been able to provide for the family if he had not taken a seasonal job with the government.

I remember when my son would get into trouble because he would predict the ending of a story. He loved stories, and he seemed to know beforehand what the ending would be. His teacher would be so upset with him. When I read him bedtime stories, I would make him guess what the ending would be before I even read the story. Sometimes he was wrong, but most of the time he was right. If he was right, he would get another story; if he was wrong, it was bedtime. He somehow connected the title to the ending, and we used to have fun predicting the stories. One day, after having talked to the teacher about the problem she was having with my son's tendency to predict the ending, I was numbed at her response. She said, "Your son spoils the ending for the other students." I asked if the stories were discussed afterwards or beforehand. The teacher asked, "Why?" I also asked her if she had asked the students how they felt about my son predicting the ending. She responded, "No. I know these kinds of things." I walked away disgusted. My son missed school now and then after that day. I guess in some way I was giving up on the teacher, and I allowed my son to stay home instead of dealing with his problems.

In Grade 6 my son hated school, but I forced him to go. He cried his heart out because he wanted to avoid the pain that he felt in school. He was often ashamed that his father was the Chief of the community, and the expectations placed on him by his peers and his teacher because of his father's position overwhelmed him. I realize now that I did not do him any favours by forcing him to go to school when he was unhappy, because he dropped out of the education system in Grade 9. My oldest son was one of those children who fell through the cracks of the education system. It was not because he did not have parents who cared or believed in the education system, but because he wanted no part of a system that allowed such pain. As a parent I felt powerless. I worked in the education system, and I could not make my son feel safe in the educational environment. I believe that I failed my son—not because he did not get an education, but because I was not there for him when he needed me.

Teachers and parents like myself can be very deceiving to children. We say one thing, but we actually mean something else. My oldest son loved to write poetry in elementary school, but his teacher in Grade 6 used to tell him that his writings were not poetry. He is now a published poet and a wonderful father to his children.

> *I think I am blessed that my son did not rebel against society. He lived a life burdened with false expectations, and I tried to make life as normal for him as possible. Did I even know what was normal at the time?*

I remember his friends being envious of him because he had a ghetto blaster. We usually bought him the new toys on the market. Little did his friends know that these gifts were bought out of guilt on my part: I gave him gifts to make myself feel better. My son told me once that a hug or acknowledgement from his father would have been the best gift of all.

This reminds me of another time when my oldest son was nine years old and needed a tonsillectomy. The doctor required him to stay in the hospital overnight, and I stayed with him. The nurse was nice until she brought out the Kwellada shampoo for lice and demanded that I wash my son's hair with it. I was devastated. My son was in a room with another child who was White, and the nurse had not brought Kwellada shampoo for him. I recalled my own feelings that only Indians had lice. My first response was to yell and scream at the nurse, but instead I told her to wait there with my son. The creepy rascal of racism was looking me straight in the eye. I walked down the hall to a telephone, phoned our family doctor, explained the situation to him, and went back to the room, where I proceeded to bathe my son. After hearing a page, the nurse left the room, but she never brought the Kwellada shampoo back to the room, nor did she return. Because my son never knew what was going on, I did not want him to experience the shame that I had experienced years before. My son did not have lice; as a parent I made sure of it.

I used to tell my oldest son that I wanted him to be a priest, but I am not sure whether I meant it. I only knew that I loved him and did not want him to get into trouble, which he never did. I was so overprotective of him because I knew no other way. Now I am happy that he tells his children every day that he loves them and that they can be whatever they want to be when they grow up. He plays with his children, is very open and honest with them, and disciplines them. I believe that he learned the hard way that life can be hard if you make it hard on yourself. My son has told me many times that I did the best I could raising him, and I thank him for his kind words.

Time passed, and I continued working with the children at the school. I used to tell myself that not everyone has to be a teacher to suppress my desire to become a teacher. I remember I first asked my husband about going to university to get my Bachelor of Education degree in 1979. He laughed and said, "If you go to university, you also get a divorce." Because I felt that my life and my relationship were working out, I laid the idea to rest in a moment of weakness, satisfied that I loved my job at the school.

It was during this time that I wanted to adopt a child. My home was a receiving home for foster children of the provincial government. I helped raise some of my nephews and nieces, and it seemed that I always had children around me.

We were sitting around the kitchen table one day and I said," I want to adopt a baby." My son and my husband wanted me to have a second child instead of adopting, and we decided as a family that I would have another child. I was 30 years old at the time, and I put the idea of adoption on the back burner. Because my husband had a full-time job working for an oil company and I had a full time job, I felt secure. Before long I was pregnant with my second child.

My second son was born on January 25, 1982. He never crawled, but he walked at seven months. My sons are 11 years apart, and it felt like a blessing in disguise that I would have another chance at raising another son. I believe that both of my children are gifted: One is a writer and one is an artist.

My second son did not witness abuse or the effects of alcohol, and I saw a difference between my children. The first one was quiet and reserved, whereas my second son was very outgoing. Nothing seemed to get in his way. He is now completing his Grade 12 and plans to enrol at Mount Royal College in the fine arts program. Every summer he works on the community student programs, and one summer, at 14, he volunteered during the whole summer to help the students who were getting paid to work. He is very responsible and gets up every morning on his own to go to school.

He is very interested in art and music, and two summers ago when he had the opportunity to attend a Comic Convention in Chicago, it was a dream come true for him because much of his art work involves Marvel comic book characters such as Spiderman and Superman. It is ironic, because his teacher had told him that his art work was not art. I remember reassuring him that his work is art and that how he sees things and transforms them on paper is a gift.

When my younger son was in Grade 7 he had a White girlfriend, which was not unusual because he attended school in a White community. In April of the school term I noticed that my son was not himself. When I asked him if there was anything wrong, he said "No," but I knew that something was not right. After he finally confided in me that a group of boys had been trying to beat him up, I asked, "Why?" He responded, "Because I have a White girlfriend." As any other concerned mother would have done, I went to his school.

To my amazement I found out that the threats of a beating were not from students at his school but from students at the high school next door, from boys who were in Grades 11 and 12. I was furious, and my husband and I went to see the high school principal. We explained the threats, and the principal responded, "Your son does not have any business going with a White girl." The response was racist, and I felt sorry for the children in his school. I removed my son from his school for the child's own safety.

The junior high school principal was very reasonable. He allowed my son to come in only for his final exams, and he passed that year. The following year we decided that he would go back to the local community school for Grade 8, and he was happy at the school. However, I knew that he was not getting a good education, but whenever I questioned the teachers about his grades, they responded negatively. Even though my son's report card showed good marks, he was not bringing any homework home, and I decided to investigate. His mark in English was 84%, and I asked the teacher, "Does he know 84% of his English assignments?" She replied," Why? Are you not happy with the mark?" I told her that it would not do my son any good if he went into English 30 not having a good background in English, and she appeared to be astounded. Was my expectation for my son to complete his education and go on to university unrealistic in her eyes? I felt that I was failing my son, but I also had to consider his safety.

During this time my son wrote this poem to me. I think it is worth sharing.

Why

Why have our people gone through so much hardship?
Why couldn't there just be peace?
Why is it that in other countries we are adored?
Why is it that when we are stared at they don't see the real beauty?
Why is it that when we fight back they think we are uncivilized?
Why is it that when we say hello they look through us like there is nothing there?
Why is it they have no respect and belief in us?
Why is it they think they are the most powerful race?
Why is it they think we are crazy, because we know the land is alive?
Why is it they do not respect their elders as we do?
Why is it that when they take something from Mother Earth they do not put something back?
And why is it they don't know that by destroying Mother Earth we will all have nothing!!!

Wilson and Wilson (1998) wrote in an editorial that we remain powerless until we can use the negative to work through to the positive and offer solutions to our communities. I

believe that my son had negative energy when he wrote this poem and that, somehow, writing it was a positive solution for him.

Life on the reserve was becoming better for all of us, but I remember asking my husband to move from the reserve because I had always thought that when I grew up I would live somewhere else. It is always beautiful on our reserve, which is located along the shores of Lesser Slave Lake in Northern Alberta, no matter the season, but I think that I never really appreciated my surroundings. However, I learned to appreciate nature from the children when I was a teacher aide. I used to take them on nature walks to collect leaves in the fall and to create a wonderful mural to keep us warm in the wintertime. In Cree classes I would take the children down by the ravine in the wintertime to cook bannock on a stick, and one time I brought an Elder into the Grade 7 class to teach them how to stretch a beaver pelt.

At our Christmas concert I taught the children to sing Cree songs. I remember one concert where the children and I were singing a number song, and we made a mistake. No one laughed; no one corrected us. At the end of the concert an Elder softly told me that five comes before six. He said nothing else, and I thought his way of reminding me of our mistake was very gentle. I have so many wonderful memories of working with the children, and I still have letters, cards, and gifts from some of them.

Beginning in the 1950s, our community school was run by White teachers and in 1981 when I began to work as a teacher aide, the situation had not changed. The only difference was the addition of a few Native staff members such as the aides, janitors, and liaison worker. Working as a teacher aide, I was assigned to a specific grade, but sometimes I worked with more than one teacher. After the teacher went through her lesson plans, she would direct me to work one-on-one with a child to get him or her caught up. I would also do the photocopying or laminating for the teacher, and if I was lucky, sometimes I would get to substitute for a teacher. In 1985 I became a Cree instructor for all the grades; I loved being with the children on my own.

Many times during my eight years at our community school as a teacher aide I sat in the staff room, listening to Anglo-Saxon teachers describing Native children as slow learners. Instead of arguing with them, I would leave the staff room with tears in my heart. The last straw came one day when one of the more experienced teachers wanted all the children tested. Our school went up to Grade 9, and he claimed that our school could obtain more government money if over 50% of the children were labelled slow learners. The idea devastated me. The room was filled with people who did not realize that they were not just demeaning the children, but they were also demeaning me. I was hurt and angry. Without a word, I walked out of the staff room, and the next day I turned in my resignation to the principal. I wanted nothing more than to tap the potential of each child, and I wanted all of the teachers to do the same. I understood that there were children with learning problems, and I knew that some children needed special help and attention. But when the teachers judged and criticized children for who they were rather then nurturing them for what they knew, I knew that the education system was not working.

I did not know how I could change the system; I only knew that the many non-Native teachers who had come to our community over the past 40 years with their own set of ways never stayed, seldom acculturated, and never understood the impact that they made within the community. One teacher in particular stood out who worked at our school for two years. She wanted to buy herself a mink coat, which she did, showed it to the staff in June, and then was gone. While she had been there, she had taught only two students in Grade 8, who both had failed.

Another time one September I walked into the new principal's office to introduce myself. I noticed on the wall a calendar with black circles on every alternate Friday. Curious, I asked him what those circles represented. Without a blink of an eye he said, "Those are my paydays. That is why I am here." My Lord, I thought to myself.

Over my eight years I had worked with many wonderful teachers. It seemed that when they arrived, fresh out of university, they were very enthusiastic about their work,

and I used to love the new ideas they tried in class. The new staff motivated me as a teacher aide. However, around January or February they seemed to lose interest. Perhaps they had been caught up in the system, or perhaps they did not want to persevere. In any case, they did not stay long. Most of the teachers stayed for two years, and once they received their permanent certification they were gone. Sometimes it felt as though some teachers were using the reservation schools only to obtain their certification.

I recall feeling that it was important for the White staff to like me when I first started working at the school. However, I soon realized that I was not the only one looking for acceptance; the children were too. Some received it, and some did not.

I left the school, wrote my resignation letter, and delivered it to the principal. I began to think of reasons why I should not go to university: I feared the unknown. I worried about the loss of critical time with my children. I was uncertain about my capabilities. Was I smart enough to get a degree? Would I do this with no family support? It reminded me of one of the former principals of our community school who used to tell me that I should become a teacher. He felt that I had natural abilities in dealing with the children. I tried to treat all the children fairly, and when I somehow sensed that a child was feeling out of place, I would work with the child to build his or her self-confidence. I also enjoyed playing with the children when I was on supervision at recess.

I remember another time when I was a teacher-aide in the Grade 5 class and was assigned to teach language arts first thing in the morning. The teacher I was working with was very open minded and allowed me to pick a novel for the students. The novel that I decided on was *The Miracle Worker*. I used a lot of props and drama in my class because I wanted the children to feel the experience of the story. I also wanted to teach them that, in spite of a disability such as blindness, a person could be successful. Before we read the story, we pretended that we were blind and paired off with another student. One was the leader, and the other was blindfolded. The exercise involved trust. The students then wrote about how it made them feel not to see anything, and I tried to relate their feelings

to the story. After reading the story, the students watched the movie. I know that they enjoyed reading the novel because even though those students are now grown up, they still remember the exercises and the story, which had a beneficial impact on their lives. This was my preferred way to teach.

There were mostly girls in this class, and they would occasionally have bad days. There always seemed to be animosity in the class, but I tried to work it out by talking to them about their issues. I did not send the girls to the office, and I refused to let them sit in the hallway doing nothing. One teacher who did not like my method complained to the principal, and because I was unqualified at the time, I was reassigned to another grade. The teacher, who taught kindergarten at the time, felt that only a qualified teacher should be teaching, and she took over the class. Every morning after that the girls would sit outside the classroom because they were not getting along. Even though I felt sorry for them, I could not argue with the professionals.

It may have been the negative events in our school or my love for the children that gave me the courage to attempt to get my teaching degree. I believed that I had a choice, and for the first time in my life I would be making a decision that would turn my life around. There was no pressure from anyone; this was my own choice, and it felt good.

I knew one thing for sure. Later that evening when my husband came home from work, I told him I wanted a divorce. When I told him that I was going to go to university to get my teaching degree, he said, "Are you serious"? When I said that I was, he responded, "If you are serious about university, I will back you up 110%." I was astounded, because for eight years I had put aside my goals, and all it took to realize them was to tell him that I was going.

Life has a way of throwing a curve ball your way sometimes, but I knew that I was ready to catch this one. I prayed that night that I would be brave enough to go through this educational journey at this point in my life. It felt as though I would be going to university for the community's benefit and not only for my own.

CHAPTER 5

LITTLE BOY BLUE, COME BLOW YOUR HORN: LIFE ON CAMPUS

The next few weeks after this major decision I discovered that life offers many different opportunities. Little did I know that another ironic situation would play a part in my life. I knew that I was afraid of being on my own, but my interview to go to the University of Alberta at the age of 37 was scheduled for early May 1989. My education counsellor, who was my sister, made all the necessary arrangements. We drove to Slave Lake, Alberta, where the Sunrise Project, a small campus linked to the University of Alberta, was located.

All courses were transferable to the University of Alberta, and I planned to take the first two years of my Bachelor of Education degree through this campus. We went to a building where I was to write an entrance exam, and I did not have the courage to ask, "What is this test for?" Instead, I proceeded to write it. It reminded me of the time when I was in Grade 1 lining up to have my hands inspected for cleanliness. I finished the first booklet and handed it to the lady who was giving the test. She began to correct it immediately and gave me another booklet. When I started working on this booklet, she quietly called me up to the front. She asked, "What grade do you have?" I replied, "My Grade 12, but I completed high school years ago." She asked, "Are you taking the right test?" When I asked "Why?" she told me that I had everything right on the test. She then asked, "Why are you trying to upgrade?" I felt silly and asked her if this was the entrance exam for the Sunrise Project. She said, "No. This is a test for adult upgrading. You have come to the wrong building. You need to go to the building down the street."

I went downstairs and called my sister, and we proceeded to the right building, where the lady in charge was waiting for us. We introduced ourselves, and she summoned me to a room to write an essay. She told my sister to go into another room, and my sister replied, "I am not here for the test." I suggested that she write the test

anyway, and she agreed. Once we had completed the essay, the lady said that she would contact us if we were accepted.

My sister and I laughed on the way home about taking the wrong test, because she had not planned to go to school. When we arrived home there was a message from the lady in charge of the Sunrise Project. I immediately called her, and she told me that I had been accepted for enrolment in September 1989. I was very happy.

> *Thinking back on my reasons for working towards my teaching degree, I felt uneasy. I thought that as a teacher I would be able to change the education structure in our community. Could I not make the children feel good about their identity? Could I not treat everyone fairly? Could I not motivate and tap the potential of the child? I also wanted to know what the teachers learned in order to teach. At the same time I think that I was responding to the negative stereotyping of First Nation people. Was I not really running away from the problems in the community? I was not bringing closure to the issue of White teachers controlling the school, and I was not dealing with the shamefulness that I felt because someone else had imposed it on me. This shame felt like a blanket of snow, and sometimes the flakes of racism and assimilation fell over me, leaving me shivering. I recognized the pain in my community. I knew that the education system had not changed, that the White teachers were still in control, still the icons in our community.*

Shortly after my conversation with the lady from the Sunrise Project, my sister called, excited that she had also been accepted, but she had not discussed it with her husband. We laughed, and she told me that if everything worked out for her and she was able to attend, as she said, "You are not making me take drama." I had nothing to do with what courses were offered, and my sister is not a shy person; at least that is what I always thought. But I never did ask her why she did not want to take drama. But everything worked out for both of us, and we both began attending classes in the fall of 1989. Drama was offered in the first semester, however, and we both enjoyed the course; it became one of my sister's most memorable classes.

Once, in our drama class when the instructor turned the lights out in the room, she told us to lie on the floor, roll around, and let out all our inhibitions. I started giggling because this was very new and embarrassing for me. Other students started to giggle. The

instructor turned the lights back on and told us to get rid of our giggles. She turned the lights on once again, and I laid there in silence. I was listening to everyone else follow her instructions. Students were moaning and groaning, trying to please the teacher. On the way home my sister and I discussed the class, and I started to laugh once more. I asked, "Did you hear that one person just moaning like she was going to die or something?" She looked at me with a grin on her face and said, "That was me." We both began to laugh. The new concepts in the courses seemed to amaze me more than anything else.

In November 1989, just after I began my studies, Driftpile First Nation had an election for Chief and Council, and I was nominated as a Council member. I won and accepted the two-year-term position, knowing that I would be attending university classes. The day of my final exam in drama was also my first meeting of the Chief and Council, presenting conflicting commitments. I decided to attend the meeting in the morning and to write my drama final in the afternoon, which resulted in a final grade of 8 instead of 9 in drama.

In English 101 when I had to read the novel *Things Fall Apart* by O'Cheebe, I encountered another educational dilemma. The professor was offended by my lack of appreciation for or effort to understand his culture. I had a difficult time pronouncing the East Indian names in the story, which made me feel disconnected from the characters in the story. The main character's name was very difficult to say, and in my mind I decided to call him Bob. I honestly shared in our class discussion of the novel what I had done, which upset the professor, resulting in my concern that I might fail the course. The students nicknamed me Bob after this incident. I do not know if this name calling was more hurtful to the professor than my not taking the time to pronounce the names in the story.

The day of our final exam in this course the professor came into the room and started writing names on the board. He asked us what the words were. They were names

of hockey players from foreign lands, and the names were familiar to me because hockey is familiar to me. I felt the example was a bad one considering that he was not teaching the class anything but trying to get his point across to me. I apologized to him that day for what I had done but said, "There was no need to punish the rest of the class for my behaviour." I should have taken the time to ask the professor how to pronounce the names in the story.

My sister and I travelled to Slave Lake every day for two years. In addition to attending the fall and winter terms, we attended spring and summer sessions because we wanted to finish as quickly as we could; I felt that I had no time to waste. In August 1992 my sister and I moved to the city to attend the University of Alberta. My nephew called me The Country Mouse and my sister The City Mouse because my experience of city life was so limited. I did not drive a car in the city, and I still do not have the confidence to do so. I did not have a bank card until I moved to the city. I used to tease my sister about new appliances such as the microwave. I'd tell her, "I can't use this. I don't know how. I am from the reserve, remember?" She would tell me that I was making excuses. I was also afraid to touch the wrong button on the computer.

Getting a degree was not the only education I experienced. My sister is a night person and I am a morning person. Sometimes it felt as though I were living by myself. Living away from my sons for the first time made me sad and homesick.

Life on campus was fast paced, but, at the same time, I felt as though only I knew that I existed. No one around me seemed to know that I was alive. In classes I was a number, and this upset me, because on the reserve I also had a treaty number. Whether a treaty number or a university identification number, I felt like a criminal in prison for most of my life.

> *I always felt that no one cared that I was a person with dignity and patience. No one cared that I had a culture. I believe that my trust in society was violated. I felt as though I was on a journey towards losing my identity. I did not know that the colonization process which I was undergoing at school and in the university was*

stripping me of my identity and history. A new order was imposed, and there were little things I avoided. For example, I applied for my status card only at the age of 48. I still do not carry a white card, which is a tax-exempt card for gas and cigarettes for treaty-numbered Natives. I believe that no matter how many cards are issued to signify my difference, it cannot change the views of others about my Indianness. I cannot even begin to understand the irony as to why it is called a white card.

I was very homesick living in the city. One day I phoned home 13 times. Wednesdays were the worst for me. When I talked to my son on the phone he would tell me that everything was all right even when it wasn't. He never wanted to make me feel bad for leaving him at home. It was his way of encouraging me to stay in school even though I wanted to be at home with my son. I missed helping him with his homework; I missed watching a movie with him. I missed him so very much. I left home on Sunday, and by Wednesday it seemed that Friday would never come.

I came home every weekend and completed all of my household tasks. It seemed as though I was living in two completely different worlds. One day my oldest son told me that my excitement about learning was wonderful, but this did not mean that I had to impose my learning onto his space. His belief was still his own, and mine belonged to me. He said, "When you come home I want you to come home as my mom." I was pained by his statement, but somehow I understood him.

Another time an elderly couple from the community said, "Will you still talk to us when you get your degree?" Once again I was hurt, but I assured the couple that I would talk to them no matter what. My sister and I were the first two people from our community to obtain our Bachelor of Education degrees. I think the goal was more intimidating to other people than to me.

One day while we were living in the city the cable installer came to our apartment. It was supper time, and my sister and I were about to eat. He commented that the food smelled so good. I offered him supper, but he said, "No, but thank you." I think he was confused. It was second nature for me to offer him food; I thought nothing of it.

However, the man was surprised. I felt as though I was breaking a norm. It seemed that I did this a lot. Another time when I was riding a transit bus, an elderly lady got on the bus, and no one offered her a seat. There were a lot of young people on the bus. I stood up and offered her my seat. She was grateful, but other people looked at me as though I was strange.

In classes the atmosphere was friendly as long as I was friendly. I did not impose my views on others until I was asked. I felt that if people asked me, it was okay to share what I thought. In one of my classes we were asked, "What represents Canada for you?" One person said, "The beaver on the nickel." Another said, "The maple leaf on the Canadian flag." The next answer made me cry later in the day. A lady said, "Indian people represent Canada for me." I think she may have meant it in a good way, but it offended me. The professor then proceeded to single me out as the only Native in the class. I calmly said, "I do not have a response at this time." I went home from class feeling sick to my stomach; I felt like I was a wooden Indian. I arrived at the apartment and threw up. I knew that all the examples given in class were animals or things that were not alive; no wonder I felt wooden. The sad thing was that no one raised an objection, not even me. In the next class the professor did not leave the issue alone. He asked me, "Do you have anything to say about yesterday's class?" I stood up in front of the class and said, "It will be a dark day in hell before I hang on a flagpole for anyone. I am a human being with a language and a culture." The room filled with silence. I sat back in my seat. A gentleman at the back of the room stood up and clapped his hands in a rhythmic pattern, and slowly others stood up and did the same. I did not expect this recognition after so few words, but I appreciated it.

I was beginning to comprehend what Longboat (1987) was referring to when he stated that "education has worked as an agent of colonial subjugation with the long term objective of weakening Indian Nations by causing the children to lose sight of their

identities, history, and spiritual knowledge" (p. 23) I did not realize that I would be subjugated to this long-term objective as an adult.

I remember the first time that I was called an apple. It was in the corridors of the University of Alberta in my fourth year. An apple is a reference to being Indian on the outside but acting like a White person from the inside, and I was insulted and shocked. My first reaction was to get angry but, for some reason I did not. I downplayed the issue and thought, How dare anyone call me an apple> How silly. But later when I realized that the comment hurt so much, I cried myself to sleep that night. The next day came and went. I stayed in the apartment all day because I was afraid someone might see me. I knew that being called an apple touched a nerve.

I remember when I went home that Friday I had to do my laundry at a laundromat. I was washing clothes beside a White lady, and another Native lady came in with about seven bags of laundry. The White lady looked at me, sneered and commented, "She probably did not wash for a whole month." I did not say anything, which served to confirm the White lady's attitude. Even as I did so, I wondered, What is my problem? Do I want to fit into White society so badly that I would give up my identity? How was I to know that this moment would play a significant role in my life?

I remember when I was a teacher aide I lectured the students in my class on the importance of obtaining higher education.

> *I think the message I was trying to give when I was a teacher aide was that higher education can allow First Nation people to develop curriculum that promotes Indigenous epistemology without shame or fear. The National Indian Brotherhood (1992) stated at a conference that "unless a child learns about the forces that shape him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, they will never know their potential as a Human Being." I believe now that I spoke with a forked tongue. I believe that education alone is not a means of gaining ownership of freedom and stature in life, but it can be a solution to First Nation communities if we utilize it as a tool to help the children understand and believe in themselves. I know the importance to me of wanting to know who I was. I needed to know that I belonged somewhere. I knew that I did not want to go through my adult life allowing people to think I was an apple.*

My last year at university went by quickly. I knew I would miss the new friends I encountered in the last four years, because some were a part of my life now. Living in the city was even becoming tolerable. I knew that in my last semester of classes I could no longer postpone taking music, because it was one of my education electives for my elementary degree. I attempted this course in my third year but withdrew. Music notes were never a part of my schooling. Here I was not only expected to learn the notes but to play the recorder. Being able to play three pieces of music was the expectation. My sister encouraged me as much as she could. She had passed her music course. I had no patience for the recorder, and I almost quit school because of the frustration of learning to play the recorder. This course was the lowest mark on my transcript. The frustration overwhelmed me to the point that it led to many discussions with my sister about the lack of music training in our First Nation community schools.

My sister and I decided to co-write a children's novel about a musical character who represented a whole note. We named the fictional character Naughty Notum. He starts off as a whole note and ends up a twelfth note in his travels. I believe it is good enough to be published.

During the summer my sister and I took jobs so that we would have enough money for our expenses during the school term. It was during one of the summer jobs that we published Cree material for school use. It was an introductory Cree program for elementary children that included flash cards and a game. Many times during our travel from school to home and back again, we put on our creative thinking caps. The board game *What Do You Know About Your Own Backyard?* developed for social studies was also created on the road. This game deals with historic and Indigenous political facts about the Lesser Slave area.

My sister and I did our student teaching in the city of Grande Prairie, Alberta. I enjoyed my placement, and the teachers I worked under were wonderful. The students were unique; I loved them all. I remember when I was teaching the social studies concept

about differences among communities. I decided on a lesson with the children, who were all White except one, about my community. I shared what it was like to live on a reservation. It had not occurred to the children that anyone could live without running water. The most intriguing thing for the children was that for many of the people in the community water was still being delivered. This was the impression the children gave me. The children thought the water-truck concept was wonderful. I can still see the face of the Indian girl in the classroom: She glowed with pride.

That day I showed the children a video about our annual pow-wow. It featured a story about a hoop dancer. The children thought the hoop dancer had magic. In music I taught them a round dance, and I was amazed at how much the children enjoyed the dance.

My student teaching placement taught me that only some children are racist. This reminds me of a time my youngest son and I were visiting his grandmother. A friend of my sister's was there who was Jamaican. We visited for the whole day, and everything and everyone was in good spirits. When my son and I were driving home he asked me, "Mom, why was everyone touching that man's hair?" His hair was very tightly curled and short. It dawned on my son that this man was different. Nothing else was said. Children in their natural state do not know racism; it is something that is learned from life experience as we get older. The Grade 3s in my student teaching placement class never questioned that I was Native.

Soon I was graduating. My husband, my mother, my sisters, and my uncle attended my graduation. It was a wonderful feeling of accomplishment. I remember my uncle crying and telling me that my father would have been so proud of me and my sister for achieving our goals.

When I returned to the community, I immediately applied for a teaching position at our local community school. My husband was the Chief of the community at the time. Once again I was in a dilemma. There was only one position open at the school, and my

sister and I both applied for it. I had struggled through my degree with my sister for four years, and she had always been there for me. When I went into the interview I was told that the job was mine if I wanted it; there was no need to interview me. My sister and I had become friends and mentors for one another, and I could not see myself competing with her. I made a heartbreaking decision that day. I withdrew my application, and my sister became the successful candidate.

I told myself that good things come to those who wait. I never told my sister that I withdrew my application. A couple of days later I was called to the Band Office. The Adult Learning Centre was looking for an instructor and a site coordinator. I was told that if I was interested I could have the job. I accepted.

This new phase of my journey changed my outlook once more in education. I would not be working for the Driftpile First Nation but for the province of Alberta. This phase brings to mind my BEd program when I wrote a paper for Dr. Julia Ellis. I wrote that what bothered me the most about the school system were the guidelines and regulations. I wondered, Would they ever change? Would I change once I received my degree? Would the system break me and change my educational outlook? I wrote that I did not go to university just to get a degree; I went to university looking for guidance. Dr. Ellis told us that if we believed in something very strongly, then we should stand behind what we believed. The more people who can get involved in a cause, the more likely they will succeed. I have come to appreciate her words of wisdom. I ran the Adult Learning Centre, not as someone in charge, but as someone responsible for the success or failure of the students.

When I started work I had nothing but a building with no materials. I asked the Chief and Council for a full-time guidance counsellor, and they agreed. Driftpile First Nation brokered Alberta Vocational College to bring their program to the community. It cost Driftpile $95,000.00 to run this program. For the first three months I was alone in the school with 28 students. Everyone went through an orientation and chose a course load.

In December 1995 another instructor was added, and life at the Driftpile Community Learning Campus was operating at full capacity. I arranged for distance learning for some of the course teaching. Some students took correspondence, some took onsite courses taught by instructors, and some took teleconferencing courses. Life seemed to settle down for me. I was honoured with the Alberta Aboriginal Role Model Award for Community Enhancement in 1995. It is an award I am very proud to have.

The experience of working with adults was a real eye opener for me. I found that many adult students were afraid of the unknown, just as the children I taught had been. I found that the adult students needed a structured system. If something changed their schedules, it seemed to upset them. In 1996 I ran for Council once more, and I was reelected for another term. I sat on Council for the next six years, and politics became part of my life. I managed to juggle my life to accommodate my schooling, my job, my elected position, and my home life.

> *I wonder now if the need for structure stems from the dominance of First Nation people by the government of Canada. Indian Affairs dominated our people for a long time. We celebrated treaty day at a certain time; the federal funding to the reservation is at a certain time; the shells and tents were given at a certain time. Our lives depended on federal handouts. The Indian Act tells us when we can have an election. The list goes on. It leads me to wonder if without them our community would be able to function.*

Some students blamed me when they failed their courses. Some students took this failure very seriously and even took their concerns to the Chief and Council. They said, "Rose was away from the centre too much. That is why we failed." I was lost for words, because responsibility for one's actions was not a reality here. I remember two other times in particular when I was almost physically assaulted by students because they were terminated from the program. I believed that the fault was theirs. The two students thought they could just collect their student allowance and not do their school work, but life just does not work this way.

One of the things I realized in the process of establishing the campus was that I needed to help students be responsible for their lives. I could not believe the spousal abuse that went on in our community; young women were still defending their lives. I remember one time when a young lady returned to class after lunch. She had just been beaten at home for returning a little late at lunch time, but she did not call the police because she knew nothing would be done. I talked to her about self-respect, but she did not make any changes in her life. This felt like a failure to me.

I ran the Adult Learning Centre for three years. I believe that the students believed that someone cared about their success. I found myself involved in their daily lives, and their struggles became mine. I allowed myself to listen to the students. In three years we had 18 graduates from Grade 12, and some of those students are now completing university degrees. Some students have been employed full time since completing Grade 12. We had more graduates in the Adult Learning Centre in three years than in all the years that we had our regular school in our community. Did caring about a person's life make such a difference? Is caring about teaching the total child missing in the regular school? Maybe the concept of teaching a child mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually needs to be examined, especially when a child's self-image is low.

The instructors, the guidance counsellor, and I cared about the students. I think this made a world of difference in the success or failure of the students. The respect that we received as staff from the students was wonderful.

One student had an alcohol problem. He never came to school in an inappropriate manner. He would call me and tell me that he was drinking; I would talk to him and tell him to come the following day, and he would be in class the next day. Students went to treatment centres from school. They did not lose their seats. There was so much room to allow for the success of the student, and I tried to allow for as many options as possible just to keep a student in school. The Adult Vocational Centre is now a recognized campus

in the province. In 2001 the province will run the centre at no cost to the Driftpile First Nations.

In 1998 I decided to return to school once more to attempt my master's degree in First Nation education. I remember that when I received the news that I was accepted into the First Nation's master's program, my heart felt very heavy, and my thoughts were clouded with fear. What am I going to find answers for? How am I going to help my community? Am I going to be a master at First Nation problems and solutions? How will I be able to help the children of the community? I knew that I did not want to see another generation of children from my community go without a meaningful education program.

I felt that nothing had changed at our community school. The non-Native teachers were still playing the role of the missionaries who once converted our people. I knew that the teachers wanted to help the children, but somehow they did not understand what the children needed. Non-Native teachers came to our community geared up to go to work. Although they had empathy for the Native students, the missionary or saviour attitude was a problem infesting our community. In my teacher education program no one taught me to understand the community in which I would be teaching. No one taught me that the educational needs of each community are different. I realized that the non-Native teachers have not learned to understand our community.

> *I know there have been great teachers who have left the community because of the parents, the political structure, and the politicians. The distrust around schooling is growing and needs to be examined by everyone. In all of this, the children are the losers.*

I remember the day when I went for my interview in Edmonton for the First Nation's master's program. There were six people on the panel, and I was nervous. Each one asked me questions, and I answered the best way that I knew how. I thought to myself, These people will determine my future. Now I knew how the teachers I interviewed back home must have felt. I had had no idea what this program was about,

but I heard about it through a friend, and she faxed me all the information at work. It stayed on my desk for one year before I decided to apply. My sister told me that she wanted to work one more year at the school before she applied. I waited. Now here we were getting interviewed for the program. We were lucky that we both were accepted at the same time. The program takes in only six new students each year. When we moved back to the city I was lucky enough to rent in the same building I had lived in before. The familiarity set my mind at ease.

The first time I met Dr. Peggy Wilson I was intimidated by her. Her expectations of the students scared me. I had no idea at the time what my thesis would be about, but I knew that Dr. Wilson was interested in ethnography. Researching my own people was the furthest thing on my mind.

We started the program with a retreat, and the students were mandated to attend. We needed to get to know one another because we were part of a cohort group. My sister and I shared a room, and working with a small group felt strange to me. I was used to going to class, writing a paper, and receiving a mark. What Dr. Peggy Wilson had in mind was different yet so familiar to the community life I was used to.

I recall a beautiful, sunny day when the students met on the lawn overlooking a lake. We sat in a circle. Dr. Stan Wilson brought out the sweetgrass, lit it, and proceeded to pass it around. I chose not to use the sweetgrass that day. I was not sure if this was real or not; I needed time to think about this process. I thought, What do they think they are doing? I did not know these people well enough to partake in their ritual.

> *At this point in my life I was just beginning to understand the traditional ways of my people. I was raised in the Roman Catholic religion. I still felt like a traitor to the religion. I have now experienced pipe ceremonies and sweats, but I still feel confused. I could not change my religion overnight, and I still struggle with my religious beliefs today. I only know that I believe in a Creator.*

As the program progressed I began to feel more comfortable with the cohort group. I am usually a loner; I like doing things on my own. I do not like to invade

someone else's space, nor do I like anyone invading mine. Drs. Peggy and Stan Wilson did everything to make me feel part of the program, but I did not allow myself to be a total part of the cohort group. I think it was because I have a hard time trusting people. I loved the potlucks we had as a group, and I really enjoyed the students and meeting their families.

There were so many wonderful events in the program that enhanced my life. I especially liked the conference organized by the First Nation master's students at the university. We did everything from raising funding for the conference to making the bags to give to the participants. Attending an international conference is required for the program. Four of the students, including me, presented a workshop in Hilo, Hawaii, at the World Indigenous Conference in August 1999. For me, the conference was a marvellous exchange of friendships and cultures.

Things seemed to lead to more exciting learning experiences in the program. Another course was called Indigenous Research Methodology. Dr. Eber Hampton was the instructor. His style of teaching and his wisdom opened my heart to a new world. This course, in particular, made me think about education in a different light. I wondered, Was education a mechanism that would allow me to be a full partner in mainstream society? I knew this had to be wrong because I still see myself as a person struggling, on a daily basis to fit into society. When I think back on my education journey from Grade 1 to my master's program, I know that I allowed myself to be a servant to mainstream society's ways of thinking. I was so caught up in trying to fit that my own thoughts became unimportant.

I was most embarrassed about my Indianness in the educational environment. I felt that Indian programs needed to be established in order for the Indians to fit in. For example, The First Nations master's program was a struggle to set up. Why was there a need to create a separate program to acknowledge First Nation students? Why wasn't a program of this calibre offered by the university itself? In that way the program would be

recognized by the administration. I thought, Education is supposed to free me, but I was feeling trapped. Why did I feel that working towards a degree made me feel that being called an apple was okay?

Earning money made it okay to put my language and culture on hold in the process from colonization to civilization. It has been a lifelong process, and sometimes this concept of a dual personality becomes distorted in my mind. I believe that I cannot split myself into two parts any more, one part being my Nativeness and the other part my White man way of thinking. I notice that when I am in one of my classes or in a meeting with a senator discussing an issue, my creativity, my talent, my intelligence are viewed differently. It seems as though when I am in a Chief and Council chamber or at a band meeting I do not feel separate from the issue.

The issue then takes on a different meaning because I cannot make it a separate part of me. The issue never changes; it is only viewed differently. I am not saying that one setting is better than the next or that anyone is smarter than the next person. I am recognizing the difference. My Indianness is viewed differently in different settings. I needed to find a way to interweave these two parts of me so that I come out the winner.

Being called an apple may have served a purpose. I did not know that working towards a First Nation master's degree would allow me to find a deeper purpose in life. In another course, Education From an Anthropological Perspective, offered by Dr. Stan Wilson, I realized that I had been totally assimilated into mainstream society's educational methods. I thought that if I wasn't a follower in the "White world," my own world would collapse.

I was shocked the day I walked into Dr. Stan Wilson's class. The discussion began with the design and format of the course. My thoughts were filled with confusion and excitement. Then I realized, We have to decide how we are going to earn our credits. This is a first! I felt I was pretty hard on myself. I was so used to the usual university structure that this was totally outside the norm for me. A great deal of time went by, and

no formal decision was made. I felt as though I was in a First Nation Council meeting back home. But in the back of my mind this process also consoled me, knowing that a room full of professionals could not come to a consensus. I enjoyed the moment because the students wanted to leave things hanging till the next day. I decided to speak up and said, "We are not going anywhere till we finalize the design and weight of this course." We completed our task before the end of the day.

There was a lot more sharing in this class, and I know I felt like I belonged to the group. I prayed that day that a greater understanding was created among the students from two world views. Beck and Walters (1977, p. 164) wrote that Native American sacred ways insist that learning, or education, is an essential foundation for personal awareness. I remember that the last presentation in Stan's class was a talking circle shared by my sister and me. I believed that the students enjoyed this process and that all of the students shared something about themselves. I think that education can be a wonderful learning experience and not a forced experience. I thanked Dr. Stan Wilson for that wonderful day.

When I think back to my courses, I believe that each course had a meaningful purpose. Each course guided my path into the reality of who I am. I will always be grateful to Dr. Peggy Wilson for her dream to empower First Nation people in their quest for higher education through a First Nation master's degree program. I think the fact that I allowed myself to discover new ideas will help me have a brighter outlook in the education arena. I cannot go back and change anything in my life; the past is gone forever. The memory will live on, but the future is mine to live out especially with the expectations that I place before myself.

CHAPTER 6

A SHARING CIRCLE: TO EACH OUR OWN THOUGHTS!

I first encountered a talking circle hosted by an Elder in a personal growth and development workshop. The Elder's name was Edward Bellerose; he passed away in August 1999. He used a talking circle as a method of teaching. The circle allowed everyone to have a turn to speak what they were thinking and feeling. If a person did not have anything to say, that was okay. A small rock or an eagle feather was used to signify a person's turn and to empower them. The talking circle I participated in became more intense as the week progressed. Each time I shared more information, and each time I was listening to others more intensely. The circle created an atmosphere of safety for me. Therefore I felt that this was a wonderful way to bring together my storied life experiences with the thoughts of people who have influenced my life in one way or another, and I decided to create a sharing circle. In this chapter I share the words of teachers, authors, and friends who have shaped my life story. I interweave my reflections on my experiences with their thoughts.

Elder Edward Bellerose and Rebecca Martel first became part of my life in a purposeful way in 1994 during the time of our student teaching placement in Grande Prairie, Alberta. My sister was having a difficult time with her placement, and I felt that she was experiencing racism. She worked 10 times harder than I did, and yet she could not please the teacher she was working with. She came home one day and said, "I should quit." It was so close to the end; we were almost done. I told her to go in and talk to the principal.

That day at work I was told that Edward Bellerose was holding a workshop at the Friendship Centre. I persuaded my sister to go with me. It was strange because the topic that he discussed was racism. My sister and I completed the program.

In 1995 I invited Elder Bellerose and Ms. Martel to do a workshop for our community. I invited students, community members, and teaching staff. The workshop was for one week, and I learned so much that week. I especially remember the lesson on the gifts of civilization, which are relationship, respect, feelings, caring, and listening. According to Elder Bellerose and Ms. Martel, we are all born with these gifts. Whenever we make use of them, we will feel good about ourselves. They shared with us that if we stop relating we will develop a negative attitude, envy others, be judgemental, gossip, blame, find fault. We will not relate any more. If we stop feeling, our inferiority sets in. We create a false pride. When we stop respecting, resentment sets in. We are unhappy. We become angry, and rage sets in. Violence becomes part of our lives. We stop listening to ourselves and others. Lastly, we stop caring for ourselves and others. We become lost. Elder Bellerose also talked about keys to cultural and spiritual well-being. Honesty and kindness were the two major keys—honesty and kindness first to yourself and then to others, to community, and to the nation. What wonderful wisdom these people shared with me. They presented in our community every year until he passed away. Ms. Martel came by herself on other occasions. She continues to share the teachings that she received from Elder Bellerose.

The process of writing this thesis allowed me to represent my thoughts about dismantling the internalized colonization process I felt embedded in my soul. According to Bradshaw on a television talk show, "The soul is the most human part of a person." I think that finding my soulfulness became part of my destiny, and my pain and frustration created an avenue to write a narrative thesis. When I started my thesis research, I knew nothing about the term *narrative inquiry*. I knew only that I had a story within me.

In June 2000 I flew to The Pas, Manitoba, to visit Dr. Peggy Wilson. I had written some of my thesis; 150 pages to be exact. I thought that I had a research question; I thought that I was going in the right direction. It was during this visit that I found out I had nothing towards my thesis, and I would have to start all over again.

I was angry and upset. I cried myself to sleep at a hotel that night in The Pas, Manitoba. After discussing my thesis with Peggy I decided to go home. I called the bus depot the next morning and chose to ride the Greyhound bus home. The ride took me 16 hours to get back to Edmonton, Alberta. I needed those 16 hours to recapture the importance of my educational struggle. I arrived in Edmonton at 7:00 a.m., checked into a motel, and fell asleep. I awoke after noon. I did not give up. I couldn't.

I taught my children that if I gave up on something important, then I was a failure. I made a phone call that would once again guide me towards my thesis. I phoned Dr. Jean Clandinin, and she was willing to see me that day. I visited her office and explained my dilemma. She agreed to work with me. She will never know how grateful I was that day. I called Peggy back the same day. She was and still is my supervisor, but Dr. Clandinin was willing to work with me. She agreed with the arrangement.

I found, as in other qualitative methodologies, I would become a part of the research. Narrative inquiry is a research methodology in which narrating personal experience in a supportive social context is a process of reconstructing a narrative self in order to understand self as more comprehensive and complex. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identified experience as "the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry" (p. 5). They wrote, "Stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experiences" (p. 7); and further, "Life is a story we live" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 149). "Memories are stories, . . . pictures of the mind, gathered up and words put to them, making them live and breathe" (Brant, 1994, p. 109). Reflecting on my life and educational experience allowed me to relive and re-evaluate the consequences of the choices that I made in my life. My life story comes from my past experiences; I allowed my memories to come alive within me.

I felt that Olson's (1993) description of narrative methodology gave me moral support because I was constantly rethinking what I thought I knew. These thoughts took me into new experiences. Olson stated that

> a narrative inquiry does not confirm what we already know, but rather makes us rethink what we thought we know. . . . [It] explores new possibilities which emerge during the research process and thus it is a form of educative experience. . . . Each inquiry must take the shape of what emerges during the process, and as such each narrative inquiry is unique. Thus it is not possible to set out a definitive set of steps in the process" (p. 251)

In the process of writing my autobiographical narrative, I found that the pieces of my memories of past painful experiences seemed to fall into place in the context of my whole life.

Through reading many writings I was able to understand the process of internalized colonization. I could relate to why I was called an apple. I understood my shamefulness about my Indianness. As a researcher I was able to relive the painfulness of my experiences with a clear mind and open heart. Scheurich and Young (1997) told us that

> when any group within a large complex civilization dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the way of the dominant group (its epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies), not only become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as "natural" or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions. (p. 7)

This "natural" state of being is what I have come to describe as internalized colonization. The process of internalized colonization is like a delicate weaving of a spider web. My thoughts, my choices, and the learning process of each experience created the strength or weakness of the intricate webbing. Understanding and appreciating who I am became a crucial part of the webbing. I no longer feel like an antagonist in our Canadian contemporary society. I have spun my web, and I am willing to live in it.

According to Rigney (1998), Aboriginal researchers who wish to reconstruct, rediscover, and/or re-affirm Indigenous knowledge must function in traditions of classical epistemological methods of the physical or human sciences. Racism will not be overcome by simply adding Indigenous researchers to the academy of research. Indigenous peoples

must now be involved in defining, controlling, and articulating our epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies that value and legitimate the Indigenous experience.

I had the pleasure of speaking to Dr. Rigney in Australia via a teleconference call in one of my courses. I told him that I wanted to share my life and educational journey in a thesis, and he said, "Go, girl!" These two words meant something to me. His words reinforced the idea of rediscovering and owning up to my own Indigenous knowledge of my experiences, my being, and my values and beliefs about myself.

1999 was a year of celebration for people in the Treaty Eight area because of the signing of the treaty in 1899. 100 years later there are still fewer educated Indians than the rest of the population in Canada. Havighurst (1981) said, "In this century there has been two goals for Indian education. They are assimilation and self-determination" (p. 329). I am a product of an institutionalized educational factory as described by Dr. Rigney (1998). Throughout my research I constantly thought about the term *colonialism*. To me it meant a policy by which a minority people's way of thinking is controlled. The term *internalized* means to take external conditions, values, or the like inside one's self as part of one's own way of thinking. I think the best example here would be the process of making me believe that the traditional spiritual belief system that the Indigenous people once had was uncivilized and making me believe that the Roman Catholic faith was the best belief system for me. I had no choice but to believe because my own belief system was destroyed by the Indian Act. Dominant society took control.

This exploration helps me justify my conclusion that the institutionalized educational structure has done an excellent job on me as an Indigenous person by extending its control over me through the assimilation process. Can the two terms *assimilation* and *self-determination* be said in the same breath? I think that by sharing my story so that others may benefit is a process of self- determination as an Indigenous person. Assimilation is a process in which I lost my self-determination. Assimilation limited my thoughts, my choices, and the judgement of myself. I allowed the dominant

society to create a false image of the stereotypical view that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. Friedman and Friedman, (1981) stated that

> there is, of course, no one solution to an issue as complex as Indian education. But it seems reasonable to assume that no viable solution will be reached unless Indians are allowed their right as people to determine, without restriction, the form and content of their education. (p. 132)

According to Dr. Betty Donahue in our class From Orality to Written Text, historians in general have customarily rejected Native oral traditions and stories as "mythology" and have given little credit to orality as a reliable record of events and experiences. However, to Aboriginal people orality has been our tradition. Our history, our traditional ways, our stories have somehow survived in the hearts of Elders. Many have been passed on from one generation to the next. I think that the untold stories need to be in written text. This is one of the reasons I cannot remain silent any longer. Silence only reminds me that I do not care any more. Keeping my story silent cannot help me or anyone else. I no longer have to hide or be ashamed of the Indigenous epistemology within myself as a First Nation person. My understanding of my experiences can be interpreted into my own Indigenous epistemology. This wisdom needs to be acknowledged and continued to be passed on to our young people in written text.

I heard a wonderful phrase on the radio today voiced by Russel Means. He said, "We are the ancestors of those yet unborn." What a powerful statement, I thought to myself. As a First Nation educator I do not want to leave a legacy of fear and disparity. I want to help the next generation of children find a path towards a meaningful educational journey. I do not want any one of them to be a child like me who was lost in our contemporary culture created by colonization.

In the book *The World Turned Upside Down* by Calloway (1994), a Cherokee headman (1751) said, "My tongue is my pen and my mouth my paper." An Elder in 1999, 248 years later, said to me, "Put your pen and paper away and listen from your heart,

because if you plan on writing it down, you will forget what was said." This may have been a coincidence, but it was very profound to me.

It was in this course that I learned that the rhyme "Ring Around the Rosie" is a rhyme about Native people when they were dying of disease. The line that the pilgrims sang, "Hush up, hush up, they all fall down" meant to fall down to their death. This is a part of written text that needs to be redefined or rewritten. I think something that is important to me that should be in written text is the true history of our people in the Treaty Eight area. The truth about the colonial process that almost destroyed the language and culture of a people in the past 100 years needs to be written.

Dr. Hampton, a very important influence in my life, taught Indigenous research methodologies. He had an impact on my life, not because he had plenty of knowledge or because he was a Harvard graduate and Native, but he taught me to understand what humility means. He wrote an article in which he explained how memory comes before knowledge. He wrote, "If I want the full value of all my experiences I have lived through, then I have to unwrap the bundle. I have to pick up the memory and feel what I really felt" (Hampton, 1988, n.p.). In my narrative writing this is what I have done. All of my painful experiences have become memories I have learned something from. The abuse I experienced needs to be shared with others so that it will give them strength in whatever they decide. The shame I shared will no longer be a part of me. I am able to hold my head up no matter where I am. Dr. Hampton said in class in 1999, "A research methodology is about your story. What is your story? Not what is positive or negative, just what is your journey."

In *The Spirit Weeps*, Marten et al. (1988) wrote that "currently the residential school experience has emerged as an area of concern and significance for many native people" (p. 108). It seems to me that this experience of separating children from parents at a young age had a drastic effect on First Nation communities. The extended family structure, cohesiveness, and quality of family life in general have suffered tremendously.

My husband's experience of being taken away from his parents at an early age and placed in a residential school left me feeling abandoned and angry. His anger created frustration within himself as a result of this abandonment. In addition to the feeling of abandonment, parents were stripped of their responsibility to parent. In my grandmother's time there were no parenting courses. Today, in our community, parenting courses are not serving their purpose. I believe that the parenting skills diminished as succeeding generations became more and more institutionalized and experienced less nurturing. My parents believed that the school was responsible for me while I was in school. The length of time for responsibility as parents lessened. I believe that the educational institutions did not have the trained staff to also become responsible parents. Today in my community, parents are at a loss in parenting skills, and teachers are also at a loss. Discipline becomes the focus of a First Nation School. Ing (1991, p. 110) said that the whole concept of the residential school experience affected all the community members. Dealing with the issue for many people will be a painful experience. My sister and I were contracted by the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Council to arrange for material such as stories, artifacts, documents, and pictures for a reunion of the people who attended the mission in our area.

The memories created by this reunion were devastating to many of the Elders we visited. I was shocked at the responses of some of them. They refused to talk about their experience. One Elder who was 75 years old left the mission when he was 15. Sixty years have gone by, and he has not dealt with the painful experience. We were looking for only comical or memorable stories of that time. Instead we discovered the unspoken pain of the Elders.

Dr. Stan Wilson was my instructor for the course Education from an Anthropological Perspective in 1999. I first heard the term *anthropology* in 1989 when I was taking my B.Ed. degree. The term *Yanomanho* is what sticks out in my mind. This uncivilized tribe, as they were referred to in class, reminds me that the term *research* means to "search again." This tribe had their language and culture; they were living a full

life. I wonder what their lives are like today. I wonder if they have been researched to civilization. When I was in Stan's course I began to question whether or not I wanted to research my own people. Why should I research my own people, my own community? It has already been discovered. It has already changed. Civilized people live here with their problems and possible solutions.

In this course we worked in pairs to present different topics. As the class progressed, I was impressed and empowered by the young people in the class. What touched me the most was that everyone respected everyone else's intelligence. It amazed me that I had come so far in my personal philosophy on life and the willingness to accept other cultures. When the topic of Indian medicine came up for discussion in class, I was floored. This topic is not an everyday topic in my household or in the community, and here I was discussing it with strangers in a university classroom! At first, I must admit, I was offended and embarrassed. However, then I realized, how are other cultures going to know what it is really about if the topic is not shared? Stan's class was different but inspirational.

Angie Debo's (1991) novel, *And Still the Waters Run*, reminds me about First Nation people's past. When I read this novel it made me think about our ancestors and the hardships they had. However, they left us a relevant legacy. For many First Nation people we still have treaties—dishonoured treaties, if nothing else. The novel makes reference to the betrayal that occurred in the United States, specifically to the Oklahoma region. She stated,

> About the orgy of exploitation. Within a generation her people, who had owned and governed a region greater in area and potential wealth than many American states, were almost stripped of their holdings, and were rescued from starvation only through public charity. Such treatment of an independent people by a great imperial power would have aroused international condemnation. However, these Indian republics were—to quote John Marshall's famous opinion—"domestic dependent nations" and the destruction of their autonomy was a matter of internal policy. (p. 204)

Our children need to learn this reality. They need to learn the truth. My son's experience of being told by a teacher that if it were not for the Whiteman, the Indians would still be wearing diapers reinforces the stereotypical view of how a domestic dependent nation should be viewed: colonize to civilize.

The notion about a non-Aboriginal teacher coming to teach in a First Nation community without knowledge and understanding about the people creates a false image within me. I no longer believe in the myth that non-Aboriginal teachers know everything. Literature changed my perspective. Ladson, et al. (1995) observed that academic success is low for minority students who are poorly served in public school. Goebel (1996) discussed the problematic nature of teaching someone else's literature and culture. Alberta Department of Education (1987) presented a consensus paper on the perspectives held by Native people of Alberta on ways to ensure that Native students obtain the same high-quality education as other Alberta students. These perspectives have not infiltrated the public system. When a Native child is misbehaving, not learning in his or her grade level, not being attentive in school, he or she is usually referred to a special class referred to as special education or the individual opportunity program (IOP). The White students usually call this class *Indians on Patrol*. Quality education does not mean out of sight, out of mind.

Other literature that I read gave me hope that change may occur in the educational structure. Allison (1994) wrote about building programs that embrace social and cultural diversity. She suggested that educators must understand the perspectives of people of different races. In a discussion paper Bates (1997) recommended changes that will enhance Native children's success in education, and also suggested that teachers receive special training to understand the situation and meet the students' needs. I believe that teachers who care about education care about the child. I believed and cared about the students I had at the adult centre, and they succeeded.

Battiste et al. (1995) examined the issues and dilemmas of First Nation education in Canada 25 years after the beginning of First Nations control of education. These findings, I thought, would inspire me. But I know that our community school is a sad example of Indian control of education. We have a beautiful new school, $6 million in the making, designed by the people of the community, with no children in it. My son went to this school. My rule for him was that he listen to the teachers, and his goal was to learn. One time I asked the teacher to spend a little more time with him while I was away attending university. She responded, "Your son is not the only child in this class. I do not have time for only him." I was not asking for all of her time; I was asking for only a little more attention to show that someone else cared about his education.

Butterfield (1994) focussed on fostering intercultural harmony in schools, improving teacher preparation, and developing curricula and strategies that support diverse cultural needs and learning styles. Fraser (1996) addressed cultural sensitivity as a goal for effective educators in Canada. All these writers discussed the need for change in the educational structures. However, I believe that the issue of *attitude* has not been addressed. I think that attitude is a major factor in the success of any classroom, no matter what ethnic background children have. What people say they will do and what is actually done are usually different. In teaching I think as a person I should acknowledge my beliefs and values because this is what displays my attitude. As a teacher I influence the child in a very big way. Spindler and Spindler (1984) confirmed that in their studies cultural transmission occurs in teaching a child.

This reminds me of the time I learned how to spell *arithmetic* with a rhyme. The concept to learn through rhyme was wonderful and a way of not forgetting the connection to the word. The rhyme went like this: "A red Indian thought he might eat tobacco in church." Was this culturally relevant? Was it a racist rhyme? The men in the community back in my days would never chew tobacco in church. No one even smoked in church. It is like singing the song "One little, two little, three little Indians, four little Indian boys"

to learn our numbers. What about the girls? As a child I did not question what I was learning or the methods used. I was only a child who loved to learn.

Dr. David Collett taught me to believe that respect exists in the institution of higher learning. He believed in me, through the writing of my thoughts. He gave me a framework for the development of what a thesis could be. I remember being in his class. The Native students who were in his class were all looking at qualitative research, and the White students were working on quantitative research. What a difference, I thought to myself. I remember the day I went to his office to discuss a problem that was occurring in his classroom: Some of the Native students thought that he preferred the White students over them. He seemed to place more emphasis on quantitative research but he was trying to teach us to do the best we could in whatever research we were doing. That evening in class we discussed the problem openly in class. The problem seemed to work itself out. The ability to look at a problem constructively and to work it out in spite of the consequence is what I admire in Dr. Collett.

There are many people who contributed to my growth as an individual. I thank each one from the bottom of my heart. Dr. Peggy Wilson (1991) noted that

> our society has a long way to go before justice can be served within our institutions. Creative and bold initiatives must be taken. Members of minority groups must have a hand in the process and product of the education they receive. (p. 381)

If I am concerned about justice in the education system, then I must take the responsibility to address the issue. I must not be silent about the degradation I encountered in my educational journey. I have to take responsibility by sharing my autobiography whether or not it creates more judgement by others.

I honour the Wilsons for their brave assistance and struggles in the development of the First Nations master's program. I honour them for creating an atmosphere of a community feeling at the university. I can say that I have become a modern-day warrior. I

believe that the Wilsons' dream is a reality. Peggy introduced me to many new ideas, people, and cultures and, most of all, awakened within me who I really am. She helped me believe that relating is a gift. She did this through potlucks at her home, at the university, in the park. She honoured her students.

The talking circles with the cohort group at her home were the most memorable moments. She allowed me into her space. I regret that I did not allow her into mine. This sharing circle was inspired by so many scholars that have influenced my life in one way or another. My recurring dream has stopped. In this dream I am running from a bear in a dark forest. I run and run until I come to an open, lighted area. I see this wonderful light around a circle of herbs and medicines. I run into the middle of this circle. The bear cannot harm me. I am no longer afraid. I suddenly feel very safe and secure.

I feel secure and safe to voice my concern about what I have witnessed in our community. I see many children in our community not listening to anyone, not to parents, teachers, leadership, or any authority figure. The crime rate for children from 8 to 12 years old has risen by 70% in our community. Drugs, alcohol, and violence are corrupting our community. The children are raising themselves. Nothing happens to them under the law because they are not old enough. Systems such as Child Welfare and Social Service do nothing.

These children I am speaking of go to school when they feel like it or not at all. These children need help. They need to be part of our empty school. They need to feel that they belong. These were the children I thought about when I wrote this poem.

Children

People say, "Our children are our future."
But as adults do we really mean what we say?
Do we really question what they learn or how they learn best?
We know that children learn from what they see!
Why not build a foundation,
Strong and sincere?
Let us teach through our customary values.
Why not teach our children about caring?
Why not build into our communities
Healthy perspectives for a brighter future?
Let us teach our children to relate to Mother Earth.

Let us teach our children about kindness.
Let us teach our children about honesty.
Let us show our children respect.
Why not utilize the old ways with the new?
Why not teach our children to feel?
Why not let our children be proud of who they are?
Why not support who they can become?

Rose!

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING

Sharing my life and educational experience through this narrative inquiry allowed me to research, to search again into my past so that I can understand and appreciate the purpose of my being on Mother Earth. I have looked inside myself and decided to deal with the memories of my painful experiences. For years I chose to live with the feeling of anger, anger created by myself using the painful experience to control me. This process left me powerless. Even as I reflected on the lowest point in my life I was able to learn. I discovered insight into the notion of why I felt less than others, why I felt shame time and time again, why I allowed myself to be abused.

Such insight is what Connelly and Clandinin (1986) referred to as personal practical knowledge which is continually constructed and reconstructed. Learning is a lifelong process. Understanding and learning from personal practical knowledge have given me the strength to bring forth the gifts of respect and humility that are held within me.

In the beginning I thought, What practical function can an autobiographical narrative play in mediating authority and visibility in our contemporary Canadian society? I knew the role of autobiographical writing can be exploitive, but I understood this exploitation. Why not exploit myself? I could write a personal depiction of the process of what I have come to call internalized colonization through my stories.

How different could identifying myself be from what I was already labelled—a treaty number belonging to a specific piece of surveyed land called a reservation? When people looked at me I thought they saw nothing. Yet in my mind I felt judged. Was it because of my skin colour? Was it because I felt inferior? My own people called me an "apple," white on the inside with an Indian image on the outside. My language and culture were stripped from me in the name of civilization.

I thank the day I rediscovered the gifts of civilization from an Elder. It gave me courage to voice my Aboriginal Cree mother and educator cry. I scream out into the wind that surrounds our society, scream so that the children yet unborn can feel that they belong. They must not feel powerless to shame. Like Elder Bellerose, I vision children, all children, gifted, visionary, earthly, and simplistic, not in mind, but in nature, as the new generation to be educated unlike any other generation, a new generation of children that will not only spark a fire that flickers but a flame that burns with a desire to learn. It is with this thought that I dedicate my thesis to the children who carry the torch towards the future.

Pepper et al. (1996) wrote,

> The children whose circle of life is not intact can be helped to repair that circle. When children are treated with mutual respect and given encouragement in the form of acknowledgement, appreciation, or admiration of their constructive actions and contributions, they begin to bloom. (p. 160)

If I look at education only as a ladder to success without feeling what each step has to offer, this education is without purpose or meaning to me. It becomes a robotic mechanism for me. I can no longer use this education as a tool to enhance my life physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I know that I relate my educational experience from this perspective of success.

I could relate selectively for my benefit only.

I could feel only what I needed. I would not acknowledge anyone else's thoughts but my own.

I could care less of others. I only need materialism.

I would only respect with false pride or not respect at all.

I would only listen for the convenience of myself.

It is not with malice that I write my conclusion in this manner. It is with respect. Dr. Wayne Dyer said on a television talk show that "the label we give to something is

what it becomes." Growing up labelled in a racist society, I began to believe that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. It negated me. It kept me behind the closed door of my memories of painful experiences.

In Dyer's (1992) book *Real Magic*, he commented, "Who you are constitutes your life"(p. 9). He said that we are walking miracles because we can sing, dance, trust, cry, laugh, and most of all believe in ourselves. It scares me to think that for most of my life I doubted myself; I never believed in myself. Others did. Were my choices only within the realm of the reservation? Every day I made a choice. Where did this choice take me? It took me only to where I wanted to go. Until I was ready I used an oxymoron like *real magic* in my life experience. The oxymoron I created for myself was manifested by the internalized colonization process. It was a real image rather than real magic. An apple.

For most of my life I lived on a reservation. People grew old here and died. I frowned upon my community for years just as the White people did. As a First Nation person I was not strong enough in my mind, body, and soul to fight the stereotypical view that I would amount to nothing. I allowed myself to be labelled. I blindfolded myself to the point where I saw only with my eyes and not through my eyes. I began to hear only what I wanted and ignored the racism. I began to function in society without the ability to care, share, relate, respect, and listen. Even in the reservation I found no meaning.

As I write this part of my thesis I am crying—not because I need sympathy, but because I feel the weight on my shoulders being lifted. I see our children in the community without a Native language and culture. I see the self-destruction of our people through the misuse of alcohol, drugs, and reliance on systems such as Social Services. I see the destruction of our community because of envy, uncaring attitudes, irresponsibility about life. I see the downfall of our Indian control over education. Control is power over what is manifested. We never had it. Our education in the community school is a carbon copy of what was already there. It is not working. What has been done to change it? I acknowledge my community for the first time with its downfalls.

As I walk this maze of internalized colonialism through my memories of painful experiences, I can see through my eyes a brighter future for myself. I want to share with people the need to tear apart or wash away the embedded parts of what I have called internalized colonization. I am not blaming anyone for this process. I believe that the Creator set me out on my journey; it is up to me what I do with it. I can only share with others. This has been a powerful healing process for me.

Today I can look at my community and see the land for the first time. The anger, hate, disparity, and shame cannot blind me. The beautiful land allowed my ancestors to survive as a people, as a nation. The land offers me an altar of natural herbs, medicines, rich soil to plant food, and the natural beauty of the landscape. I can sit by my window on a Sunday morning and see the morning sunrise. Then I can watch the wonderful sunset. I see my family struggling to get along. I see my family celebrate the holidays and birthdays. I see the reservation as my home, a land base set aside to give me hope for the future.

I can no longer stay wrapped up in my cocoon of internalized colonization. I need to open my wings now and discover Mother Earth. I need to discover myself and others. I have become a beautiful butterfly. I can now appreciate and be proud of my Indian name, Mountain Water Woman. I received this name in a pipe ceremony in 1999.

I can practice living in harmony and peace without falsehood. I can live by the gifts of civilization that were given to me in my bundle of hope. My journey into my self-actualization is a blessing in disguise. I believe tomorrow will open new doors for me. In the novel *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers* by Debbie Ford (1999) I read a wonderful line that hit a home run for me: "Pain is passed down from generation to generation; if it's not questioned, we'll never break the cycle" (p. 114)

I leave with these words of wisdom that I have come to live by. It will not be an easy journey, but I know that it is possible. The choice is up to me. I believe that I have broken the cycle of my pain.

I am no longer blaming because blaming only causes resentments.

I am no longer making excuses because excuses continue to create a false pride.

I am no longer taking the easy way out because the easy way out does not allow me to open new doors.

I have come to a greater understanding of my past, present, and future

Solely by reasoning out the process of internalized colonization.

Thank you!

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